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[AS BLANCHE ENTERED ZITELLA WAS PUTTING ON A MAGNIFICENT TIARA OF DIAMONDS.]

## FIRES UNSEEN.

### CHAPTER VII.

LADY FITZROY could talk of nothing but Zitella. She was delighted at the prospect of presenting London with a new beauty. She considered that Valentine Eyre had done her an honour in entrusting his ward to her care.

The clever woman of the world felt justified in predicting the most brilliant future for the young *débutante*, who had all the advantages of youth, loveliness, and a most romantic history.

Blanche Hastings listened with well-concealed anger and mortification to endless plans for her rival's future.

She did not hate Zitella because she was young and lovely,—Blanche was too beautiful to bear comparison with any other. She would not have grudged the girl a royal duke could she have secured one, but she did grudge her Valentine Eyre.

None guessed that the cold, haughty Miss

Hastings had loved this man for long years, with a love as devoted and intense as it was hopeless.

So Lady Fitzroy dilated on the sensation which her *protégée* could not fail to create—never dreamed that every word was like a dagger thrust in the heart of her listener.

Blanche, thinking silence was her only safeguard, set her pearly white teeth together, conversing only with well-bred smiles of assent, while she felt that compared to this torture Zitella's presence would be an actual relief. She felt almost glad when she heard that Miss Czarvas was to arrive on the following afternoon.

Never had Zitella looked lovelier than when she entered the drawing-room of Lady Fitzroy's splendid house in Belgrave square.

She had left her school for ever. A splendid future lay before her, and her brain and heart were full of thoughts which gave added grace to her step and form, a heightened glow to her exquisite cheek, and a more intense depth and darkness to her wonderful eyes.

She was also attired in garments which a princess might have sighed to wear; but the

dainty plumes, the costly velvet and lace, seemed but the smallest items of this girl's marvellous beauty.

She entered the drawing-room with an air of graceful self-possession, which charmed Lady Fitzroy, and drove Blanche to despair. The girl was high bred and lovely beyond all fancy, and Valentine loved her.

Miss Hastings' heart died within her; but as she took a second glance at her rival she entertained a belief that Zitella was careless and frivolous.

Her head would soon be turned by the adulation of society, and then, (Blanche breathed hard), might she not hope that the girl would turn from Valentine to some higher prize?

While these thoughts sped through Blanche's mind, Lady Fitzroy was greeting her guest in the most affectionate manner. She took Zitella's daintily gloved hands between her own, kissed her lips, and expressed a hope that the dear child had not quite forgotten her journey from Spain three years ago. Zitella, having made an appropriate reply, was led forward and introduced to Blanche, who smiled and uttered pretty words in her

usual well bred fashion, while hatred and pain raged like fierce fires in her heart.

Lady Fitzroy looked on, delighted that her two special *protégées* should be friends. She never saw below the surface, and dreamed not that all this effusion of cordiality was but a mask for mutual and deep-rooted antagonism.

Blanche's hatred of Zitella deepened as the moments passed. This girl had won the love for which she would have died, and as she looked on the beautiful southern face she could not wonder. She knew herself to be a beautiful woman, but she knew, too, that she might as well ask a farthing candle to eclipse the sun in brightness, as hope that her beauty might live beside the glowing loveliness, the dangerous power of fascination, which dwelt in Zitella's every glance and motion.

Oh! if she could only find one blemish; but the form, in its flowing draperies of rich black lace and velvet, was perfect; and she felt bound to confess that if the face could be out-rivalled it would be by those rich masses of amber hair which lay coiled, sleek and shining like yellow snakes, round the head, which an empress could not have carried more proudly.

Blanche Hastings set her teeth hard, and with a fierce heart-pang came the wild desire to wound or insult her rival in some way. The means came with the will, and she said, smiling sweetly,—

"Have heard of you under so many names, Don Leon, then Sobieska, and Czarvas. It is—er—very confusing!"

Zitella's face betrayed nothing. She answered with a smile,—

"Czarvas is the name to which I have best right. I find, on looking over some letters of my father, that ten years before his exile and death the Countship of Czarvas was conferred on him by a grateful Government. The letters have been for years in the keeping of my nurse and foster mother, who delivered them up to me the other day."

"How deliciously romantic!" smiled Blanche. "But what strange vicissitudes you have had!"

Blanche's speech was not finished, for at that moment some visitors were announced, and there was necessarily a suspension of hostilities; but Blanche never removed her eyes from her rival's face. A certain expression or attitude of Zitella's had caught on her fancy, and like a flash of lightning came the conviction that she had seen the girl before, and under unusual circumstances.

But where? Blanche Hastings was still asking herself this question, when, that night, she disrobed herself in her own room. She was certain her previous knowledge of Zitella was not due to some passing glimpses in the street, or at any fashionable assembly. She might have seen Zitella at a theatre or in some crowded picture-gallery; but she felt sure that the face was connected with some incident which at the time impressed, but now escaped her memory, and, so thinking, Blanche Hastings at last fell asleep.

When she awoke the next morning Blanche Hastings was still thinking of Zitella, nor did the events of the day offer any distraction of her thoughts; but another wakeful night failed to furnish the link which was wanting in Blanche's memory. Valentine Eyre had ridden with Zitella in the afternoon of that day, had eaten his dinner by her side, and enjoyed the opera afterwards in the same, to him, delightful proximity—to the utter misery of one woman and the envy of every man who caught a glimpse of Lady Fitzroy's box.

Thinking of these things made Blanche toss all night on a sleepless pillow; and on the following day, feeling that she must unburden her mind to somebody, she wrote a letter to a friend who had been cut off by bereavement from the pleasures of the London season.

In a few days the answer arrived—half a dozen sheets full of nothing in particular, but there was one portion which happened to possess the most vital interest for the reader,

It was this:—

"I return the photograph, and must confess that the girl is perfectly lovely, but I have seen both it and the original before, and so have you—at least the original—and I wonder you can forget. Do you remember New Haugh last summer? I am sure you can recall an evening, when driving back from Lady Obelwynd's party, we saw a pair walking in the shadow of the Firley Grange woods."

"The girl made an impression on you because of her beauty, the man on me because of his resemblance to the Marquis of Eastshire. Now, my dear, prepare yourself for a surprise. That man was Egerton St. George, the Marquis's scapegrace brother. The girl was Zitella Czarvas—the new beauty. I met St. George about three weeks ago, and, remembering the New Haugh episode, questioned him about it. He denied ever having been near the place. But I happened to see a photograph of Miss Czarvas in his possession; and when he saw that I was convinced he confessed that it was some little school-girl with whom he had picked up an acquaintance."

"By-the-bye, if you go to the New Gallery you will see a picture of Egerton St. George's—'A Summer Idyll'! I fancy he told me it was called, by Hugo Brand, or Bond—I forget which. St. George's prospects were very gloomy when he took to painting, because his brother had refused to pay his last New-market losses; but the Marquis has since then not only relented, but developed symptoms of rapid consumption, so the scapegrace has gone off to Spain in high spirits to avoid his creditors and wait for the tide."

The letter ran on in this manner; but Blanche Hastings read no more just then.

She sat down, and, leaning her cheek on her hand, remained in an attitude of puzzled thought. The story had given her an advantage over her rival of which she had never dreamed; but she knew not how far she might turn it to account, nor did she dare to hope for too much, for, after all, her informant might have been mistaken.

But Blanche was resolved on some immediate plan of action. So she rose, and went downstairs, using no way before her, but prepared to guide her conduct according as circumstances should direct.

She found Lady Fitzroy and Zitella alone in the drawing-room—the latter in ecstasies over a basket of gems, which were her lover's latest gift.

They were some diamonds which had come to Valentine from his mother, and he had had them reset for his betrothed.

As Blanche entered Zitella was putting on a magnificent tiara before one of the mirrors, and as the priceless gems flashed and sparkled above the matchless tresses they out the heart of the beholder as if it were glass.

Zitella came dancing towards her rival, the stones gleaming and sparkling on her neck and arms.

"Are they not lovely?" she cried. "It was so sweet of Valentine to bring them; I shall wear them to-night at Lady Dene's."

Blanche's lips paled in the effort to utter words which should not betray her jealousy.

"They become you well," she murmured at last. "It is a pity Mr. Eyre is not a duke! You ought to be a duchess, or a marchioness at least. Diamonds and titles," she added, smiling, "should only be bestowed on those who can add lustre to them."

"How sweet of you! But, indeed, you over-rate me, and I am quite content to be Mrs. Eyre; but I hope, dear Blanche, you will win a title."

As Zitella spoke her impulse was to fling her arms round her companion's neck; but she was repulsed by Blanche, who turned away, saying coldly,—

"Mr. Eyre would grudge your caresses, I think, were he by to see how lovely you look in those jewels. Why is he not here?"

Zitella's face at once assumed a regretful expression.

"Oh! is it not tiresome? I was so absorbed

in these lovely gems that for the moment I forgot my annoyance; but Valentine has left me for a few days. He merely came now to present this gift and say farewell. He has been summoned to his father, who is ill."

Blanche's heart beat wildly. What could be more opportune for the success of her plans than Valentine's absence? Circumstance seemed already to be playing into her hands; but it was in the most natural tone that she consoled with Zitella on the temporary loss of her lover.

"Yes! is it not most tiresome?" assented Zitella. "You know we were to have gone to Mr. Steele's *matinée* this afternoon. Then there was Signor Dolcinetto's *soirée* and Lady Dene's dance afterwards. Now I shall not enjoy any of these events the least little bit."

"It will be as hot at the *matinée*," said Blanche, taking up a large fan, and waving it gracefully. "And we have got stalls, have we not? Of course, Mr. Eyre got stalls; he knew that in a box you would be besieged between the *scots*!"

Zitella laughed, as she held up her arm towards the light to catch the sparkle of the gems which encircled it.

"Poor Val!" she murmured. "I half promised him that I would not fulfil any of these engagements, and I think I shall keep my promise—at least, about the *matinée*."

"Did Mr. Eyre ask you not to go out?" queried Blanche, with a supercilious elevation of her delicately pencilled eyebrows.

"Yes! You seem surprised that he should make such a request!"

"Frankly, I am. I thought Mr. Eyre's freedom from the least spark of jealousy amounted almost to indifference."

Zitella's face flushed, and there was an angry glitter in her dark eyes.

"Then you do not know him," was her quick retort. "My betrothed is as jealous as a Moor or a Spaniard. You know his mother was a Castilian, and he is supposed to resemble her strongly. I should not like to bridle with Valentine," she laughed slightly. "I could imagine him taking his revenge in the good old way," and she drew one pretty jewelled hand with a significant gesture across her slender throat.

"What a horrible idea!" shuddered Blanche "and how very inconvenient for you. In that case," she added, smiling, "I think we had better forego Mr. Steele's *matinée*."

"I mean to forego it," replied Zitella, who had long ago made up her mind on the subject. "But what are we to do?" she added, gaily. "We must go somewhere. I cannot forget my eyes on these gems all day!"

"Let us do a round of the galleries," suggested Blanche. "I know you have been there before, but there is a picture which I particularly wish to see."

"What a happy suggestion!" rejoined Zitella, winding one jewelled arm round her friend's neck. "I adore pictures; but when Valentine took me round my attention was diverted between him and the walls. To-day I shall give no thought to anything but the pictures."

Blanche, by a swift movement, extricated herself from the unwelcome embraces of her companion's arm.

"Your caresses are very sweet!" she said, lightly. "But look in that mirror; your radiant colouring makes me look positively hideous."

"You would not dare to breathe so gross a libel on any other face," cried Zitella.

Then, with light laughter, the two girls separated to equip for their afternoon amusement.

"London has not grown accustomed to you yet, Zitella. See how you are being stared at. There is an old flame of mine, Evelyn Danvers. He does not even see me because of you."

"I am indifferent to the gaze of the multitude. I have come to see the pictures."

"And so have I," retorted Blanche, as

they moved into the north room of the New Gallery. "But what an indifferent collection, and I wish they would put the names on the pictures! Catalogues are such a bore. You are so energetic, dear; look out for one hundred and twenty-one. I think it must be the one that I want to see."

Zitella turned to the number required, and read, in a clear, unfaltering voice.—

"A Summer Idyll," by Hugo Brand.

"Ah! I thought so! I knew the mountains and that cottage. It is a portion of my uncle's estate at New Haugh; but how vague and inappropriate the title! I expected something much more suggestive. Really I can't conceive why such poor work should have been accepted; but I believe the Marquis of Eastshire was potent—"

"The Marquis of Eastshire!" interrupted Zitella, and there was the very slightest tremor in her voice.

Blanche smiled slightly as she replied,—

"This is Lord Egerton St. George's picture; he is a brother of the Marquis of Eastshire. Hugo Brand is only an assumed name."

"No, I don't think much of the work or of the painter either, though by Jove it is more than I expected of St. George, but it proves, after all, that the worst of us have some spark of the divine. There is a touch of poetry about that sunset."

As Zitella slowly recovered from her first surprise she caught these words uttered in her immediate vicinity.

Two or three men, overhearing the girls' conversation, turned, inspired by a sudden desire to see this particular picture.

"St. George has gone to Spain, I believe," remarked another.

"So much the worse for Spain," was the comprehensive but cautious rejoinder.

"Poor Eastshire is not a bad fellow."

"He is good enough to be no relation to St. George; but I heard yesterday that his life is only a question of months. I could almost wish, for the sake of the peerage, that an untimely wind would sweep St. George to his proper sphere before then."

"Who's the next heir to the title?"

"Churchill Penance—a capital fellow! I dare say you know him."

"Rather. We were chums at Eton, and wrangled for honours at Lezards. We pulled in the same boat, belonged to the same coaching club, and were even rusticated together. Best old chap in the world is Churchill; but I never heard him mention any connection with the Marquis of Eastshire."

"No, I should think you would not. The Marquis is not a bad fellow in his own way, but he and Churchill Penance would have little in common; they are near cousins. All the same, though, Churchill does not seem to have inherited the family constitution."

The two men moved off, and Blanche's interest in the pictures languished visibly; but Zitella also seemed tired as they passed into another room. She complained of a headache, which apparently prompted Blanche to suggest tea and home.

"I think I shall eschew all gaieties for this evening," said Zitella, as she entered the bansom which she and her companion had chosen in preference to Lady Fitzroy's carriage.

"Cruel girls, you do not consider society. An earthquake would be less fatal to the success of to-night's entertainments than your absence. But what will London say?"

"It may say that I am too much in love with my betrothed to enjoy anything in his absence," and Zitella smiled like an angel, while her dark eyes glowed with a rapture of such tenderness that even her companion was deceived.

"Ingrate," she murmured; "the world worships you, and you are callous to its pain!"

"I have only one world; but here we are. How short the drive has seemed," replied Zitella, as the bansom drew up before the door of Lady Fitzroy's house in Belgrave-square.

A foreign ambassador dined at Lady Fitzroy's that evening, and was studiously devoted to Blanche, who received his attentions with a coldness which seemed to have the effect of eliciting more fervent worship from the ambassador.

But he was not the only company, for there was Charlie Beresford, a professional dinner-out, and one of those men who, having elected themselves charge d'affaires of London society, are always able to tell you the latest unpublished thing about anybody and everybody.

Zitella had not been five minutes in Charlie's society before she divined that he was a hand-book to general information. She therefore smiled her sweetest upon him; and having adroitly turned the conversation in that direction, soon found out all that there was to be told of the Marquis of Eastshire's family, and also the exact part of Spain which Lord Egerton St. George was supposed to be contemplating by his presence at that moment.

Charlie Beresford was never cautious in his remarks on people, but deference to his audience prevented him painting Lord Egerton St. George in his proper hue; still, the portrait which he presented was so very black that Zitella exclaimed in shocked, sad tones,—

"I have always associated noble deeds with noble birth, but if Lord Egerton is all you say I am sorry for him; but his brother's death may reform him. Of course he will return to England then."

"The ten plagues of Egypt would not reform St. George," replied Charlie Beresford, excitedly. "But I think it will be some time before he shows his face in London again. He knows well that there are at least three clubs that meditate asking him to withdraw his name."

"I daresay he will find means of enjoyment in Spain," was Zitella's careless rejoinder.

"I have no doubt of it," muttered the other.

"Like his Britannic Majesty, St. George finds opportunities everywhere!"

Zitella did not choose to hear this remark; but reply was just then inexpedient, for the moment of withdrawal had arrived. Charlie Beresford had risen from his chair as he spoke, and as he held the door open for the ladies to pass through he bent forward, and whispered in Zitella's ear,—

"You will give me at least one dance to-night? I shall turn up for that alone."

She smiled encouragingly. She would not be at Lady Dene's, but she did not choose to say so just then.

Lady Fitzroy was exceedingly provoked when, in the drawing-room, Zitella announced her intention to remain at home that night.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed with unusual energy, "it is absurd, preposterous, cruel!"

"It may be all this to you, Lady Fitzroy; but Valentine will be pleased that I have not gone out."

"But what am I to say to Lady Dene? What excuse am I to make?"

"You need not make any excuse. Say simply that I refused to go out in the absence of my betrothed."

Blanche Hastings laughed slightly; Lady Fitzroy's face was a study.

"My dear Zitella!" she exclaimed, in horrified tones, "it would be better to announce you a sudden victim to scarlet fever than convey such an excuse as that!"

But Zitella resisted all Lady Fitzroy's appeals, even when they were strengthened by the arguments and appeals of Charlie Beresford, who had made great haste to join the ladies in the drawing-room.

"How can I leave you alone?" exclaimed Lady Fitzroy at last, seeing that Zitella was was not to be moved.

"Dear Lady Fitzroy, I shall be quite happy. I have got a new novel to read and letters to write, you know," and she looked very lovely in a sudden assumption of languor. "I have been accustomed to early hours, and I am yet scarcely acclimatised to vanity fair."

"Mr. Eyre should be happy," rejoined Lady

Fitzroy, and as she spoke the butler entered with the announcement that my lady's carriage was waiting.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"Laurel is green for a season, and love is sweet for a day,

But love grows bitter with treason, and laurel outlives not May."

"Has my son come yet, Martin?"

"Mr. Valentine cannot possibly be here, sir, for another hour at least."

Vyvian Eyre twisted about on his pillows, and turned his pinched and peevish face to the wall.

"Go and look out again, Martin."

The servant was prompt to obey the command; but, returning almost immediately, announced that there was no sign of any vehicle approaching.

"A dutiful son is mine, indeed!" muttered the sick man bitterly. "He knows I am dying, and he leaves me to the mercy of strangers."

The servant, who heard these words, might have been hurt, for he had given Vyvian Eyre thirty years of faithful service; but these thirty years had inured him to ingratitude, and so, drawing the brocade curtains close together, he suggested that his master should sleep.

But, with an angry hand, Vyvian frustrated Martin's design for his comfort. Starting up in bed he tore the curtains apart, exclaiming in irritable tones,—

"Confound it! Shall I see so many more sons than you wish to deprive me of the little light which is left?"

He sank back on his pillow, breathing with difficulty, for this paroxysm of anger had exhausted his feeble strength; and Martin, after one glance at the face on the pillow, turned away to stifle a sigh—for his master, disliked cordially by others, was very dear to him.

"A dutiful son is mine," repeated Vyvian Eyre. "What right has he to be away in London wasting his substance, while his place is going to the dogs?"

Martin might have reminded his master that it was he, Valentine's own father, who had driven the young man from the place; but recriminations were not very much in his way, and, as before, he refrained.

As he watched Martin arranging some medicine bottles and glasses on the table a suspicious look darted into Vyvian Eyre's cold and sunken eyes, giving him a still more evil and disagreeable expression than he had before possessed.

"I believe my son was never apprised of my state!" he exclaimed, in a voice so shrill and sudden that Martin was startled, and shattered a small phial in his anxiety.

Vyvian Eyre was firmly convinced that this was an acknowledgment of the man's guilt, and he almost sprang from his bed in his excitement and terror.

"Ha! Villain, traitor!" he cried, in hoarse, gurgling tones. "I knew that you were determined that I should die alone, so that you might reap a rich reward. Perhaps—" and his eyes glazed—"you have planned to take my life! How do I know that my son has not conspired with you against me?"

"Father!" cried a voice that moment; and at the unexpected sound Vyvian Eyre sank back on his pillows, while Martin, relieved and joyful, advanced to greet Valentine, who had entered unannounced and unheard.

"Father!" repeated the young man, in a voice which was harsh with indignant surprise; and, seeing the young man's evident distress, Martin hastened into a whispered explanation.

"You must not mind my master, Mr. Valentine. He is a little delirious. He hardly knows what he is saying."

"My poor father!" muttered Valentine, as he pressed forward and saw in Vyvian Eyre's

face the deep, indelible footprints of selfish evil years.

With an anxious glance at Valentine, Martin withdrew, and when they were left alone together the sick man extended his hand to his son, who grasped it with a tenderness which was as undeserved as it was unexpected.

"I am greatly changed, Val."

Vyvian Eyre's anger seemed to have died away, and he spoke with a smile which had, however, the effect of distorting his features, and making them more forbidding than before.

"We all change, father!" was his son's reply.

"I daresay you are changed, too! How do you like being a widower, my boy?"

Valentine's face flashed in a sudden thought of Zitella. He could not speak of her to his father, who had ever denied him the least sympathy, and repulsed his affection until it had almost died out altogether.

Vyvian Eyre chuckled as he saw the colour mount to his son's brow. His sunken eyes gleamed as he said, in malicious tones,—

"Ha, ha! Perhaps you like the state so little that you mean to put an end to it? Take my advice, and don't. A wife is always a nuisance, but a second wife—oh, Heaven!"

"Don't you think you had better refrain from talking, sir?" interrupted Valentine, stiffly.

"Confound it, sir!" was the irritable rejoinder. "Why should I? Do you think I brought you down here for the pleasure of looking at you? No; I sent for you because I wanted to talk. I have a confession to make!"

Vyvian Eyre, having finished these words, indulged in a series of chuckles, during which Valentine stood with his eyes on the carpet, and in his mind the conviction that his father's brain was wandering.

He could not dream that this unseemly mirth was in anticipation of his own suffering.

"Deathbed confessions are delightful things sometimes, Valentine."

Hearing his father's voice the young man looked up, and rejoined, in grave tones,—

"It must be always an immense relief when they are over. I can fancy no—"

Vyvian interrupted with another chuckle.

"Mine will be a relief to me. I have brooded on it so long, I have derived great enjoyment from the thought of my revenge; but why I put it off until now I cannot tell."

"Your revenge, sir?" said Valentine, in a mystified tone. "I do not understand. On whom do you wish to be revenged?"

The sick man smiled a strange ghastly smile, and the muscles of his face contorted until its expression was simply horrible.

There was a moment's pause, and then on the silence these words fell,—

"On whom but you, my son, who have always been hateful to me for your mother's sake."

Valentine gasped for breath. He hoped that this was some wild fiction of a disordered brain; but malice was Vyvian Eyre's only disorder, and, enjoying his son's astonishment, he went on slowly.

"Listen to me. You've got a brother who has more right to the name of Eyre than you. I was married before ever I knew your mother, and when I wedded her my first wife was alive, and, what is more, I was fully aware of the fact."

"Good Heaven, what infamy!"

The words broke through trembling lips from Valentine's tortured breast. His face was livid as the face of the dead; but Vyvian Eyre went on, exulting in his evil power to wound.

"My first wife was a Spanish gipsy, a mere child when I first crossed her path. Oh, Heaven, how lovely she was! To think of her now makes the fires of youth rekindle in my veins. Well, she loved me, and I married her, not intentionally, in a legal manner. I had meant to soothe her fears with a mock marriage, but when accidents frustrated my design, and I felt myself bound for life to

Aphra, my love naturally cooled. My gipsy wife became a burden, from which, however, I soon found means to free myself.

"I was unscrupulous, Aphra innocent; and when I told her that our marriage had been a sham she believed me, and without a word went back, so she said, to die among her own people.

"So, freed in this easy manner from one entanglement, I resolved never to entail myself in another; but I wanted money, and when I met Fredegonde De Nunaz I determined that her father's coffers should replenish mine, which a reckless life had emptied faster than ever I thought possible.

"In Fredegonde and her haughty old father I found an easy conquest. One only cared that I was handsome, the other that I was nobly born. I saw Fredegonde daily for about a week; then, at the end of that time, I proposed and was accepted, and, as the Spaniards are more impulsive than we are, the close of another week saw us married with every detail of pomp and splendour which it is possible to imagine.

"Had I gone to England then," continued Vyvian Eyre, "all would have been well; but I remained in Spain, and there before long I met Aphra again. The treachery which had broken the girl's heart had enhanced her beauty ten thousandfold, and the thought that she had been put far from me made her almost dear.

"I revived her faith in me by plausible excuses and lovely words. My task was easy, for Aphra's heart was soft and true; and when I told her that some maddening doubt of her truth had inspired me to tell her a lie about our marriage she believed me, and crept to my arms without a reproach."

Vyvian Eyre paused and breathed hard, not in remorse, but the fierce hatred which years had not quenched.

"To keep the secret of my second marriage from Aphra was my first thought," continued Vyvian Eyre, "and for some time I kept it so well that neither of my victims suspected anything.

"Aphra, happy in her love and innocence, found her cup of joy full when she became a mother. More weeks rolled by, and still nothing transpired; but this success emboldened me.

"I grew incautious, and aroused Fredegonde's suspicions. She watched me, but in silence, and I saw no breath of the fierce jealousy which burned within her—an all-consuming fire.

"She watched me," repeated Vyvian, and a look of hatred swept across his face, distorting his features, "and found full ground for her suspicions. She tracked me to Aphra's abode, but still kept silent, and I knew nothing—nothing until her deadly work was done.

"One day," continued Vyvian, "news was brought to me of Aphra's death. I went, and found your mother there, by the corpse, who repeated what I believed to be my wife's dying confession. It was this: That between the time of our parting and our second meeting, Aphra, believing herself free, had married, and the boy I thought mine belonged to another—a gipsy man, who had already taken the motherless child away. I believed this story until, in this very room, twenty years ago, your mother confessed it a falsehood with her dying lips. The revenge which I vowed then is now accomplished. Remember, you have no right to any name but your mother's, and this estate being entailed goes to your brother Hermann. It is your duty to seek him out, and restore that of which your mother robbed him."

Vyvian Eyre sank back on his pillows, while a ghastly smile of triumph sat upon his livid features, and the silence which reigned in the room was like unto that of death.

It was at length broken by a single sound—a sound like a sob, more fierce and bitter than a curse.

It broke from Valentine, who stood trying to realise the blow which had fallen on him,

and it was his sole comment on his father's crime.

He stood for a time silent and immovable; then, without another look at the rigid form on the bed, he strode from the room.

On his way downstairs he came into contact with Martin.

The servant glanced wistfully into the young man's face; but finding it stern and pale as marble he repressed a sigh, and passed on to his master's room, leaving Valentine to find his way out into the open air.

There was a terrible weight of shame and sorrow on the young man's heart. He had thought himself done with suffering—that with Zitella's love the happiness of his life had begun; but what were the disappointments, the pangs of the past, compared to the disgrace which had come upon him?

In that hour he did not dare to think of Zitella.

The story of his birth when revealed he would have thought could make no difference in the state of her feelings towards him; but he was a man of honour, and if he could have dared to think of Zitella he would have told himself that she must be set free.

He did not, however, think of Zitella; but his heart turned just then towards his dead wife's children, and he told himself that this infamy had come upon him as a just retribution for his neglect of those who ought to have been his first care. He felt deeply thankful that his children had never been known by any other name than that of De Nunaz for this would in a measure shield them from the consequences of his father's sin; but still it was very bitter to think that some day the finger of scorn might be pointed at his son or daughter.

His heart yearned tenderly towards the wife whom he believed to be lying in her grave, and he was glad that she was lying there, for this would have been a bitter blow to her proud, sensitive spirit; but it struck him with startling force that Celia had now, wherever she might be, a deeper cause of sorrow, seeing how her children were neglected by their father. A sharp pang of remorse seized him, and he resolved that on the following day he would pay a visit to Lookesly Hall, in Southshire.

"My master wishes most earnestly to see you, sir."

Roused from his unhappy reflections, Valentine paused in his walk, and, turning, met the troubled eyes of Martin gazing into his face.

"I think he's very near the end, Mr. Valentine," whispered the servant, in tremulous tones.

"The end of what?" was the young man's bitter retort. "Go back, and ask him that."

Valentine having spoken was turning sharply away when Martin laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Oh! Mr. Valentine," he began, piteously, "I take a liberty; but my friendship for you is as old as your life, and whatever his faults have been you won't let him die alone at the last!"

Valentine shook off the man's arm with this vehement demand,—

"Why shouldn't he die alone? It's a small punishment for his crime. You do wrong, Martin, when you tempt me to cross yonder threshold again."

But still the young man did not move, and, having stood silent and irresolute for a few moments, Martin said slowly,—

"Mr. Valentine, my master's not been a good man, but he'll be likely to die better with you than without you."

Valentine turned round and glanced into the servant's face, then said slowly,—

"You may be right, Martin, or you may not; but, at all events, we will go now."

And no more was said, as the two retraced their steps to the house.

Valentine Eyre returned to the sick room just as the physician was leaving it. Doctor Porter recognised the young man, and out in the corridor told him that Vyvian Eyre's

hours were now numbered. They conversed in whispers for a few minutes, then shook hands and parted, the doctor to go down to his waiting carriage, Valentine to enter his father's room.

He found that during his absence a visible change had taken place in the patient. Vyvian Eyre knew that he was dying, but he had the strength to be malicious. As he had lived so he would die—false, mean and cruel. He chuckled as he saw the misery which his hand had wrought reflected in his son's white-set face; but while he rejoiced in it he cringed to Valentine, asking him to remain by his side to the last.

"It won't be very long," he muttered, feebly, gloating like a miser over the hours which were still left to him to exult in the falsehoods which he had woven for his son's destruction.

"Long or short, I will remain with you to the last."

This was Valentine's sole reply to his father's appeal. He knew why his presence was desired; but as he spoke he touched the bell, and Martin appeared, in prompt obedience to the summons.

"You can go to bed," whispered Valentine to the servant. "I will keep watch to-night."

Martin, though he loved his master, felt unbounded gratitude for the permission. He was worn out from want of sleep, for Vyvian Eyre was as exacting as he was ungrateful.

"Heaven bless you, Mr. Valentine!" whispered Martin. "I will lie down in the adjoining room, and if you want anything you can call me."

He then bade the man good-night, and, seating himself in the shadow of the bed curtains, prepared for a long vigil. Martin had given him the most minute instructions about the quantity of medicine to be given, and he was careful to pour it out at the proper hours. Each time Vyvian Eyre drained the glass he showed the innate cruelty of his nature by remarking, maliciously,—

"I hope you have not poisoned me, Val! The time is so short it would scarcely be worth your while."

Once he said, with a most vindictive chuckle,—

"I should advise you to go and live on your father-in-law's in Castile. It was well old De Nunez did not know that you had no right to your father's name; but after all you have lost little besides."

He was stopped by a violent spasm of pain, and Valentine dropped his head on his hands, too stricken for words; and thus he remained until the prolonged silence came to him suddenly as being strange. He put out his hand, and, drawing aside the curtain, looked on his father's face. Even in the dim light of the night lamp he could see that a ghastly and terrible change had taken place. The next moment a pitiful cry of distress and pain rang through the room. It broke from the breast of the faithful Martin, who had suddenly started from his sleep in the next room. His fears were all confirmed as he looked over Valentine's shoulders at the pallid, evil face on the bed. He took his master's hand one moment in his, then dropped it heavily. It was the hand of the dead; then, turning on the living a face grey as ashes, he wailed bitterly,—

"Oh, Heaven, my master! I have lost my master!"

That was the deepest, the sincerest lament that was made for Vyvian Eyre. Many followed the dead man to his last resting-place, but none mourned him. And of all Valentine had least cause to regret that the tomb should have closed over a base and worthless life.

When all was over Valentine explained his position to Martin, and then turned his back on Chavenage Court for ever. He would first go to London, offer Zitella her freedom, and then set forth to seek his brother Hermann. Honour he felt required all this of him, though

Martin urged him frantically to treat the whole story as the delusion of a dying man's brain. He refused to be separated from Valentine, and was ready for his sake to endure permanent exile from England, for Valentine was resolved to spend the rest of his life in far-off lands. He had completely abandoned the idea of going to see his children. "What profit," he asked himself, bitterly, "could they reap from a dishonoured father?"

Accompanied by Martin he went straight from Chavenage Court to London.

"Is Miss—are the ladies—no, I mean Lady Fitzroy. Is Lady Fitzroy at home?"

The butler at Lady Fitzroy's house in Belgrave-square was every whit as confused as his visitor.

"Miss Szarvas is not here, sir. At least, I mean—but Lady Fitzroy expects you. That is to say, I think she will be glad you've come so quickly."

Then Valentine, looking pale and haggard, was ushered into the presence of Lady Fitzroy, who half rose to meet him, then sank back in her chair in the most violent agitation.

"Oh, Mr. Eyre," she exclaimed, between hysterical sobs, "how terrible such things are! How shall we discuss the matter?"

Valentine was surprised at this display of emotion.

"You allude to the death of my father."

So the young man began; then paused, struck by a terrible thought. Could his father's malice have prompted him to anticipate him with Lady Fitzroy? He drew nearer, and, laying his hand on his companion's arm, said, in agitated tones,—

"My father told you all before his death."

Lady Fitzroy's nerves were evidently very much unstrung, for she received these words with a little trembling cry.

"Then your father is dead. I did not know it—and you left him to come here?"

Valentine hastily detailed the manner of his father's death.

"Then you did not receive my telegram?" asked the lady, pityingly.

"No. What was your telegram about?" queried Valentine, in startled tones.

The ominous silence which followed was a preparation for evil tidings; but Valentine did not dream of what was to come.

"Oh! Mr. Eyre," gasped Lady Fitzroy, "I cannot believe that a girl could have been so wicked, so heartless! The night you left she refused to go out, and when we returned we found her gone. She had taken all her jewels and handsome dresses, so we knew it was a deep-laid plan. But that is not all, for this morning I discovered during my absence my room had been invaded, and a quantity of gold taken from the secret drawers of my desk. There was only one person who knew the gold was there."

"Who was that?" asked Valentine, sharply.

"Of whom are you speaking?"

Lady Fitzroy did not reply, and in his terror the young man's hand tightened on her arm until she cried for pain—a cry that Valentine did not heed.

"For Heaven's sake, speak," he cried, hoarsely. "Say who has fled!"

"Zitella Szarvas! Your ward, who would have been your wife."

Valentine dropped Lady Fitzroy's arm suddenly.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with a strange smile. "I have been rude—hurt you. You must excuse me. Zitella Szarvas—" he paused, and his calmness forsook him, shattered in this cry,—

"Good Heaven!—Zitella! What a blind fool I have been!"

The next instant a peal of bitter, scornful laughter rang through the room.

(To be continued.)

## EDEN'S SACRIFICE.

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### CHAPTER VIII.—(continued.)

BUT in spite of her beauty, Mrs. Marchmont was not as cordial as was her wont when her son presented Miss Gordon. To Sir Wilfred she was even less gracious.

"And now I will present you to the mistress of the house," laughed Marchmont—"my niece, Sylvia Fane."

"What a dear little fairy!" exclaimed Miss Gordon, enthusiastically, kneeling beside Sylvia. "My dear, I hope we shall be great friends."

To Marchmont's amazement Sylvia drew herself up with the air of a *grande dame* whose dignity has suffered.

She had never developed any of the propensities of the *enfant terrible*, and it was therefore all the more surprising when she answered:

"I am not a fairy, and grandma says it is very rude to address a person the first time one sees her as 'my dear.' I don't think we shall ever be friends."

Mrs. Marchmont and her son were intensely shocked, but Sir Wilfred laughed heartily.

Fortunately at that juncture Mrs. Marchmont's maid came in to conduct Miss Gordon to her apartments, and Walter went away with Sir Wilfred.

While he was away Eden re-entered the drawing-room.

She was still pale but exceedingly lovely in her creamy lace gown.

"They have come?" she asked of Mrs. Marchmont.

"Yes," with an uncontrollable sigh. "She is very beautiful, and her brother is one of the handsomest men I ever saw."

"She is not half so pretty as you are, Eden!" cried Sylvia, indignantly; "and she's not a bit nice!"

"You should not say that, Sylvia," answered Eden, reprovingly.

"I will! I don't like her, and neither does grandma. I saw it the moment she came in. It won't be like our nice home at all while she is here. Uncle Walter," as the door opened to admit him, "what made you ask that horrid woman here?"

"Hush, dear! You must not say that. It is neither polite nor kind. I hope for my sake that you will not speak to her again as you did to-day."

Rebellious tears arose in the child's eyes.

"I will not speak to her at all if I can help it!" she answered, passionately. "I hate her! I knew she was going to make trouble the moment I saw her."

Marchmont glanced at Eden uncomfortably. There was something in the child's words that brought back his presentiment of the morning.

Eden took the little thing in her arms and endeavoured to comfort her.

But before she had succeeded the door opened and Sir Wilfred Gordon entered.

He appeared even handsomer in his evening dress than he had in travelling costume, and as he was presented to Eden his magnificent dark eyes were aglow with admiration.

"Were you ever in Corfu, Miss Chase-more?" he asked, with a decidedly English accent.

"Never!"

"You must pardon me for asking, but you are so like a portrait of a Greek girl that I once saw there that any one might readily mistake you for the original. It was purchased by the Earl of Douglas, and was considered the most valuable addition to his celebrated collection."

Marchmont frowned.

His high spirits had suddenly vanished, Sir Wilfred's admiration could not be mistaken, and it angered Sir Wilfred's host.

But the Baronet was unconscious of that fact. He maintained his position beside Eden,

watching, without impertinence, the play of her expressive features, the movement of her graceful hands.

Then suddenly he saw her start. Every particle of the lovely crimson faded from her lovely lips; her face and eyes were rigid as death; her hands clasped each other until the sharp nails made great blue marks in the delicate flesh.

Sir Wilfrid glanced up to see the cause of her agitation.

Miss Gordon had just entered the room.

The eyes of the two women met, and while the smile never faded from Miss Gordon's lips, the pearl sticks of a magnificent feather fan were crushed beneath the nervous clench of her long, slender fingers.

"Sir Wilfrid glanced from one to the other curiously, but cautiously.

"Miss Gordon, allow me to present you to Miss Chasemore, the daughter of the house," Walter Marchmont was saying.

But both women bowed without knowing clearly what they were doing.

"Miss—Chasemore?" Miss Gordon interrogated, turning her eyes from Eden to Marchmont.

"Yes."

Again Miss Gordon's gaze was fixed upon Eden.

"You must have thought me very rude," she said, in a curious voice; "but your face is so strangely familiar that I thought we must have met before. I beg your pardon."

There was an uncomfortable silence in the room for a moment, broken at last by Walter Marchmont.

"Your brother spoke of Eden's resemblance to a portrait he saw in Corfu," he said. "Probably the same resemblance struck you."

"Doubtless," answered Miss Gordon, dreamily.

It was late in the evening before Sir Wilfrid had an opportunity of speaking with his sister alone.

"Who is she?" he whispered, hurriedly.

Miss Gordon laid her hand upon his arm with almost superhuman force.

"She is the sister of Malcolm Carleton, and wife of Bertram Staunton, whom both believe to be dead," she answered, hoarsely, "and she has recognised me."

Sir Wilfrid straightened himself up suddenly, a hard, stony expression marring the beauty of his features.

"The devil!" he ejaculated. "This is—Remember, Bertha, everything depends upon the success of this move. It must not fail, at whatever cost to Eden Staunton. You understand?"

"I do. You may trust me."

## CHAPTER IX.

"I look as though I had lived through twenty years of torture in one little night," whispered Eden, the following morning, as she looked carefully at her reflection in the mirror. "It will cause comment, and necessitate—ah! Oh!" flinging up her arms despairingly, "I thought I had done with all that; and just as I fancied I had found peace, if not happiness, all the old misery is before me again! Why has she come here? and who is that man who calls himself a baronet and her brother? I ought to tell Mr. Marchmont, and yet I dare not—I dare not! It would bring out all that hideous story that I have sacrificed everything to conceal. Malcolm would be disgraced—Bertha a convict! Oh, I cannot—I cannot!"

She flung herself upon her knees before a chair, and sobbed bitterly.

Half-an-hour later she descended to the breakfast room, wan and haggard, but explained it away with the always serviceable plea of headache.

"You must show Miss Gordon the rose-garden, Eden!" Mrs. Marchmont exclaimed, a few hours later. "It will make the time drag less heavily while the gentlemen are inspect-

ing the stables. We are very proud of our rose-garden, Miss Gordon. Some of the specimens are unusually fine!"

"They are my favourite flowers," returned Miss Gordon, sweetly. "Will it increase your headache, Miss Chasemore?"

"Not at all," answered Eden, nervously. "Will you come, Sylvia?"

"No," replied the child, shortly. "I hate roses."

Eden turned away with a sigh.

She dreaded to be for a moment alone with the woman who had played so tragical a part in her heart history, yet realised that they must understand each other. She must know what treachery was meant to Walter Marchmont—to the son of the woman who had been a more than mother to her.

She tied on her sun hat with trembling fingers, and lifted her eyes wistfully to Miss Gordon's cool, smiling countenance.

"I am ready," she said, simply.

"And I."

Pausing to kiss Mrs. Marchmont with a curious, lingering fondness that seemed increased tenfold that morning, Eden passed from the room, followed by the dainty, exquisite woman upon whom Mrs. Marchmont could not look without a shiver.

"What a charming woman Mrs. Marchmont is!" remarked Miss Gordon, as she and Eden passed beside a magnificent Camille de Rohan bush. "Are you nearly related?"

"We are not related at all," replied Eden, coldly.

"Not you seem quite like mother and daughter. I suppose you have always lived with her?"

Eden lifted her eyes, allowing them to rest with quiet scorn upon her questioner.

"Of what use is this masquerade between you and me?" she asked, haughtily. "Do you think I have not recognised you?"

Miss Gordon did not even change colour. She smiled calmly into the quivering face, and with utmost nonchalance seated herself upon a rustic bench.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked, coolly.

"I see our conversation is liable to be a long one, and I was never able to stand much. You won't? Then you will pardon my retaining my seat, I am sure. You think, then, that we have met before?"

"I am sure of it."

"Will you be good enough to tell me for whom you take me?"

"I know you to be the woman who has wrecked my life and my brother's!" cried Eden, passionately. "You are the wife of Bertram Staunton. You are an adventurer. You are a false, heartless woman, utterly without conscience."

"Don't become so dramatic, child. You can say all those dreadful things in a tone so much quieter and inore ladylike. Let me see! You must explain your position here to me somewhat. Of course I could find out for myself in time; but I don't wish to betray anything by accident that you wish concealed. Does Mr. Marchmont know that your name is not Chasemore, but Carleton? And does he suspect that you were once Bertram Staunton's?"

"Hush!" exclaimed Eden, with a terrible shudder, lifting her hands as though to ward off a blow. "He knows nothing—nothing!"

Miss Gordon smiled with calm satisfaction. "You are a sensible girl," she said, in a sort of purring fashion, that was maddening to Eden. "Men, and particularly women, of Mrs. Marchmont's old-fashioned ideas, are so absurdly particular. Besides, it would be exceedingly unpleasant for Bertram Staunton, not to mention Malcolm Carleton. Of course you will not speak here of ever having seen me before."

"That depends entirely upon circumstances."

"Circumstances is a word I never liked. It is so vague."

"I am about to explain. Although in no-wise interested in your affairs, except so far

as they concern those who have been good to me, I must ask your purpose in coming here."

Bertha laughed.

"You think I have one, then?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well, perhaps you are right. If I tell you, is it to be silence for silence?"

"I will answer after I have heard. If there is to be no treachery to either Walter Marchmont or his mother, then for my brother's sake I would say nothing."

"Suppose I should tell you that I am tired of the life I have led, that I have placed myself under my brother's care because I wish to change all that, and that I have come here as an introductory step into society?"

"I would not believe you."

"You would not?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because Sir Wilfrid Gordon is not your brother. Were he so, he would never have brought you to this country to redeem your past, where you must be known to so many. Yours is a face once seen never forgotten. The man you call a baronet, like yourself, is but an adventurer!"

"How worldly wise you have become, my dear little sister-in-law!" sneered Bertha. "Perhaps you will tell me then why I am here?"

"I cannot fathom the depth of your cruelty and wickedness. I will tell you upon what condition I will keep your secret."

"Well?"

"That you leave here at once and for ever."

Bertha's eyes flashed with a venomous green, her lips drew tightly over her white teeth, and her nervous fingers ripped in fragments a costly bit of lace.

"Otherwise you will tell Walter Marchmont the story of Bertha Staunton?" she asked, daily.

"I will!"

"Do you know what would be the result of that?"

"I care not."

"Nevertheless, let me tell you. As you know, Eden, I have absolutely nothing to lose. Let me impress those words upon you—absolutely nothing! You say Sir Wilfrid is not my brother, but an adventurer. Well, granted that be true, it leaves less than nothing. Bertram Staunton was the one man on this earth whom I loved. I would have sacrificed life and soul for him, but he wearied of me and deserted me."

"From that hour I became a desperate woman. I was penniless, helpless, heart-broken; but instead of drowning myself, as most women would have done, I resolved upon revenge."

"I cared nothing for what I did, or what became of me. The feeling has not changed, except perhaps to intensify. If the gallows loomed before me within the hour, I would slip my head into the noose with a smile."

"Listen to me, Eden, and don't shiver like that. You say if I do not leave here at once you will tell Walter Marchmont the story of my life. Well, then, do it; for I refuse! But let me tell you the consequences before you act so rashly. Do you think I don't know why you left your home and have made your brother believe you dead? It was because you wished to save your name from disgrace, and Bertha Staunton, the man whom you loved even as I have loved him, from the penitentiary."

"Now, listen! Tell this history of mine to the Marchmonts if you will. Within the hour all the world shall know how Malcolm Carleton's sister was wedded to a bigamist, and before the day is over Bertram Staunton will sleep within a prison. That I shall share his fate matters less to me than the death of that poor worm that I crushed beneath my heel."

Eden panted. The woman's face was so stony, so relentlessly cruel, that she could not doubt her

words. What was she to do? She felt like a leaf tossed by a storm, a drop of water in an eddy.

Pale, but tearless, she sank upon the seat beside Miss Gordon.

"Let us understand each other before we separate," continued Bertha, in a low, even tone. "What is it to be—peace or war?"

"I cannot answer," replied Eden, miserably; her small hands clasping each other helplessly. "Wait! You must not injure Walter Marchmont in any way. I would suffer anything, endure any disgrace, submit even to death before I would allow that. Spare him, and I will not speak; but attempt to injure him and I will tell all at any cost—at any cost, I swear it! Let me go! I feel as if I were choking, strangling! Oh, Heaven, why must I be made to share her odious guilt? Have I not suffered enough for a single moment of folly?"

She arose almost unconscious of her movements and fled away, leaving Miss Gordon sitting there, a hard, cruel smile upon her beautiful mouth.

"Poor little fool!" she muttered. "She has signed her own doom. I tried to give her a chance, but she would not have it. Well, this is no time for sentimentalism. My illustrious brother, Sir Wilfred Gordon, will best know what measures to use to stop her mouth. I must find him. There is not time to be lost, for pretty Eden must be looked after at once."

#### CHAPTER X.

SIR WILFRED GORDON, in elegant negligé, half-reclined in one of the large easy-chairs that went far towards making Marchmont Villa one of the most luxurious mansions in the country. His feet were elevated to about the same plane as his head, and a dainty Egyptian cigarette rested between his handsome lips.

The dark, magnificent eyes were half closed, and a warm smile softened and beautified his whole face. It faded, however, as the door opened to admit the woman he called his sister.

"You?" he said, coolly. "You appear disturbed. Has anything occurred?"

"Yes; else you may be sure I should not have sought you," replied Bertha, sullenly.

"You are not polite, and it is so much easier to pull through life on a smooth basis. For Heaven's sake don't let us quarrel this time! Sit down, compose your nerves with a cigarette, and tell me what has happened now."

He drew from his pocket a handsome silver cigarette-case, but Bertha waved it aside with impatient disgust, sitting down upon the extreme edge of a chair.

"As I feared, that girl has recognised me!" she exclaimed, diving into the subject without preliminaries.

"You mean Eden?"

"I do."

"Well?"

The word was uttered with quiet inquiry.

Bertha gazed at him in some surprise.

"You don't seem to realise what that means to both of us!" she cried, coldly. "She threatens to tell Walter Marchmont everything!"

"Umph!"

"Should she do so, you know as well as I that the game is up. Our finances are at too low an ebb for failure now."

"You are right!" exclaimed the man, springing to his feet, and walking nervously up and down the room.

Bertha watched him curiously.

"Well, what is to be done?" she asked, after a prolonged silence.

Wilfred Gordon did not reply, but continued to gnaw his graceful moustache viciously.

Bertha's eyes half closed, a dull, greenish hue marring their beauty.

"Is it possible, my dear brother," she exclaimed, with withering scorn, "that you

have fallen in love with Bertram Staunton's wife?"

He paused before her in his rapid walk, and buried his hands deeply in his trousers-pockets.

"And if I have?" he asked, his eyes catching and holding hers with curious force.

A slow, sneering laugh fell from the woman's lips.

"It is a bad time for sentiment," she answered. "We need money, and money we must have. I cannot allow you to spoil this golden opportunity by any nonsense like that."

"May I ask how you expect to prevent it?" he inquired, coldly.

She leaned forward, a peculiar pallor upon lips and cheek, her fingers clutching the arms of the chair.

"By telling her, if necessity requires, that Sir Wilfred Gordon, the aristocratic baronet, is none other than the celebrated Rupert Howard, coiner, forger and ex-convict," she replied, slowly.

"You would not dare!"

"Would I not? Surely in the years of our enforced separation you have forgotten the characteristics of the woman you once swore to love and cherish! I would go even further and tell Eden Staunton that you and not Bertram are my lawful husband. Aha! There is nothing that I dare not do!"

"Let me warn you, Bertha!" he cried, hoarsely, never releasing her from that magnetic gaze. "I used to admire that unshrinking, fearless disposition of yours, considering it your greatest charm, and I yielded to you in every point, because there was no reason why I should oppose. But all that has changed now. I demand something beyond money. There is no reason why we should not be honest with each other—you and I. Come, let us review our stand. You wish to deceive Walter Marchmont into a false marriage in order to fleece him. That is correct, is it not?"

"Disgustingly so!"

The man threw himself into a chair and looked at her a few moments in silence.

"Well," he said at last, "I've no objection. But this time I demand part of the spoils, in addition to half the money."

"You mean Eden?"

"I do."

"You would spoil all!"

"Not by any means. I will tell you a little secret that I have discovered."

"And that is—"

"Marchmont loves her."

"Pooh! I saw that long ago, and for that reason your desire is impossible to grant. Eden cannot remain here. She threatened to tell everything if she has cause to think we are contemplating any treachery, as she terms it, towards him. She will keep her word; therefore she must be got out of the way at once. For Heaven's sake, put aside sentimentalism, Rupert, and remember that this is our only chance! If it fails we are lost!"

"Do you mean you would kill the girl?"

"Such thoughts should never be put into words. Hush! That must be the last resort."

Rupert Howard or Sir Wilfred Gordon looked into the beautiful face before him and shuddered.

It is doubtful if he ever loathed anything in his life as he did that lovely fiend at that moment.

"And what is the first?" he asked, his voice scarcely more than a whisper.

"I have come to ask you."

"You are more of a schemer than I, for all my sojourn in the penitentiary."

"You will help me?"

"Yes, provided you do not attempt to harm a hair of her head. Listen to me, Bertha. You think I do not know of your love for Bertram Staunton because I have never reproached you with it, but I do. I know that if he had loved you, you would not only have sacrificed me, but every desire, every interest

in life for his sake. But he did not. He is what the world calls an honourable man and a gentleman, and when he discovered your real character he despised you. That made of you the fiend that you are. Well, what is fair for you is fair for me. I gave you a chance; you must give me mine. Just such a love as you had for Staunton I have for his wife. A divorce from you would do me no good, for that would not free her; but give me the opportunity to win her love without telling her what I am, what I have been, and I swear that I will leave you unmolested for the rest of your life!"

"How can I consent?" asked Bertha, after a brief pause. "While she remains under this roof my hands are tied—I can do nothing."

"You will not abandon this one scheme, then?"

"Don't talk like a consummate fool!" cried the woman, roughly. "We have not one hundred pounds between us and the workhouse. You say I loved Bertram Staunton. I do not deny it; but he had a portentous bank account of his own, while this girl whom you have been foolish enough to love is a pauper. If you care"—coolly—"to forge young Marchmont's name for a few thousands, and run the risk of the penitentiary again, I may consider it. Don't let us waste time in talking nonsense. Eden must go, and at once!"

A pause, longer than any that had preceded it, followed, during which both seemed to be thinking profoundly.

Then Gordon raised his head with a sudden jerk.

"Have you thought of a plan for getting her away?" he asked.

"No. It is a difficult thing in this country."

"Will you give me three days?"

"For what?"

"To decide upon something."

"You will promise not to interfere with my arrangements in any way?"

"Yes."

"And that you will do nothing without my sanction?"

"Yes."

"Then I consent. At the end of three days I shall be here to hear your plans. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

Without a backward glance, Bertha left the room, and he watched her until the closed door shook her from sight.

"Poor little Eden!" he muttered. "A dove in the talons of an eagle! In three days! If I can but win her love—but I never shall! I know it, and the consequence will be that I shall become even a greater fiend than the woman who so coolly plans her destruction. Poor child! I should like to be able to read the future and know her fate!"

#### CHAPTER XI.

"EDEN, will you do me a favour this morning? I have one of my old attacks of neuralgia coming on, and shall be of small service for several days."

The speaker was Mrs. Marchmont, who had sent her maid for Eden a moment before.

The girl knelt by her side in the darkened room, and in the hall Wilfred Gordon paused, glancing through the half-open door, and listening to the tones of the sweet, low voice.

"You know how gladly I will," answered Eden. "I am so sorry for your headache."

"I may be able to fight it off by remaining quiet, but if Alice does not receive her necklace in time for the Featherstones' ball to-night she will be so disappointed. Then, too, it is her birthday, you know. Walter is compelled to go to town this morning, and I shouldn't like to trust it to any one but you. I dislike to ask you, because it is such a long, tiresome drive."

"It will be quite delicious if you will allow me to take Daisy, and go on horseback."

"Take any horse you like, darling, but be careful. It is a long distance, and the roads are rough. You know what it would be to Walter and me if anything happened to our little girl. I expect it would be safer to put the necklace about your throat, under your habit."

As she spoke, Mrs. Marchmont took from its case a string of magnificent diamonds and clasped them about Eden's firm, white throat, while a pair of gleaming eyes watched the scene.

"How becoming they are to you, little one!" Mrs. Marchmont continued, patting the lovely cheek. "I hope some day to see you with one even handsomer of your own! I would never care to see mine on a more exquisite throat, and Walter—"

Eden rose hastily, her face painfully crimson.

"It is after eleven. I must start now if I am to return before dark," she exclaimed, unsteadily. "I am so glad to do even such a little thing for you, dear Mrs. Marchmont, and I do hope you will escape the neuralgia, Good-bye! I shall tell Sylvia to be very careful of you."

She kissed the woman who had been so much her friend on either cheek, and left the room with more than usual haste.

The hall was deserted.

Half-an-hour later, exquisite in her perfectly-fitting riding habit, Eden placed her foot in the hand of a waiting groom and sprang lightly upon the back of a superb chestnut filly that stood impatiently pawing the ground.

"We'll have a delicious run, you and I, Daisy," she said, patting the animal's graceful neck.

"Don't let her have her head too much, Miss Eden!" exclaimed the groom, warningly. "She's a little fresh this morning. If I had had my way, I should have given you one of the others."

"Nonsense, Dick! I'm all right. She'll have the freshness taken out of her before I get back."

"Yes, miss, I suppose so; but I should feel easier in mind if you'd allow me to go with you."

"Why, how absurd you are! I have ridden Daisy hundreds of times."

"I know, but not in the condition she is to-day."

"I'm not in the least afraid. Good-bye, Dick! It is very kind of you to be interested. I shall be back by five. Now, Daisy, you must be very decorous to calm Dick's fears."

The groom released the head of the restless animal, and she started down the pretty white drive through the park, leaving the servant shaking his head ominously.

Eden was relieved to be alone. The air was cool and bracing, the breeze seeming to fan the cobwebs from her brain and enable her to think more clearly.

She was just congratulating herself upon the fortunate chance which gave her an opportunity to decide upon her future course of action, when a sudden turn in the road brought her upon a solitary horseman.

He was dressed in irreproachable taste, his coat fitting with rare perfection.

As the clatter of a horse's hoofs reached him, he turned his handsome head calmly.

In well-feigned surprise, he drew rein, and lifted his hat with almost caressing courtesy.

"You, Miss Chasemore? This is an unexpected pleasure!"

Eden made no attempt to conceal the frown upon her face.

"I was not aware that you had left the house, Sir Wilfred," she exclaimed, coldly.

"You are not gracious," he answered, smiling as upon a wilful child, "I can think of nothing more delightful than a canter with you on a morning like this."

"I am afraid you will be disappointed, I am not out for pleasure to-day, but business."

"Indeed! At least you will not refuse to

allow me to ride with you a little way. When you wish it, I will turn back."

Eden bowed, her annoyance still unconcealed.

They rode side by side for a few moments in silence, and then very earnestly Gordon leaned over and laid his hand upon the pommel of her saddle.

"I wish you would tell me why you are so prejudiced against me, Miss Chasemore," he said, gently. "I have done all in my power to win your confidence and esteem, but without the smallest success. Won't you tell me in what way I have given offence?"

Eden's lip curled scornfully,

"Of what value can the confidence and esteem of a governess be to you, Sir Wilfred?"

He ignored the only too apparent sneer and answered, passionately,—

"Of more value than anything else in this world, Eden—even to life itself—for I love you! There, don't start as if I had struck you. There can be no offence meant when an honest man asks the woman he loves to be his wife."

There was no possibility of doubting the man's earnestness. His dark face was aglow with feeling, his fine eyes luminous with the first real passion of his life.

Eden was astounded.

"I cannot express my surprise, Sir Wilfred," she stammered. "I don't seem to understand it at all, but I have no love to give any man."

"Don't say that, dear!" he exclaimed, his pain very real. "May I speak very plainly to you, Eden?"

"Go on."

"Last night, for the first time, I heard a strange story, and it was to be alone, that I might think it over, that I came out here this morning. The story came to me from the lips of an erring but repentant woman. I need not attempt to picture my horror and pain, Eden, when I tell you that woman was my sister!"

"Your—sister?" stammered the girl.

"Yes. The story she told me was the connection between your life and hers."

"And you did not know before?" breathlessly.

"On my honour, no! Could you think it? Have you never heard the romance of our lives?"

"No."

"It is too long to tell you now, but when quite a child Bertha was stolen by her governess, who loved her with almost insane devotion. All our efforts to discover her were fruitless, and the grief killed my mother, my father following soon after. Six months ago, on her death-bed, Miss Balcarras wrote to me. I came to England and found my sister. Last night she taxed me with my love for you, and upon my confession of it, for the first time she told me the history of her life, and its connection with yours."

He had taken his hand from her saddle, and, as he finished speaking, he turned his head as though to conceal the grief and shame in his eyes.

Perhaps the expression was genuine, for some feeling of remorse for the dastardly crime he contemplated was certainly tugging at his heart.

The tender soul of the girl was moved to pity.

She put out her hand, and laid it lightly upon the man's arm.

"If this is true, I am very sorry for you, Sir Wilfred," she said gently. "I can understand, from my own terrible suffering, what such a blow must be to a proud man."

Gordon's eyes filled with tears. The soft voice touched him strangely, and his strong fingers closed over those that rested upon his arm.

"It is doubly hard for me to bear when I realise that one of my own flesh and blood caused you that terrible suffering," he exclaimed, unsteadily. "Child, child, if you

would only let me wipe this disgrace from your life by an honest name! Come to me, Eden, as my wife. No one will ever love and cherish you as I shall. I will make you forget the past. Darling, you have believed me ignoble, thinking that I knew this horrible thing when first we met; but now that you know that I was in ignorance of it, tell me that you will accept my love—that you will give me tolerance until I can win your heart. Eden, will you be my wife?"

She drew her hand from his, not unkindly.

"No, Sir Wilfred," she answered, gently. "It shames me to confess it, but my heart is still with the man who deceived me. I can be no man's wife without love."

"But you will change. You cannot remain for ever true to a man like that. How can there be love where respect is not? Give me time, dear—let me have but an opportunity to win you; then, if I must concede failure—"

"Please hush, Sir Wilfred! I appreciate your generosity, and I humbly beg your pardon that I have misjudged you; but I beseech you to allow this subject to be buried between us for ever. I can be no man's wife; I have no love to give."

"You will give me no word of hope, then?"

"I cannot."

"At least you will not forbid me your society?"

"Even that would not be honest. Of course, so long as you remain at Marchmont, I must see you occasionally; but after that I hope, for both our sakes, we may not meet again."

Gordon's whole face quivered with some deep, unconquerable emotion.

They rode for some time in silence, when, with a suddenness that startled her, he turned, and, dropping the bridle upon his horse's neck, put out both hands to her.

"Then say good-bye to me here and now, Eden," he cried, huskily. "I should only make my own misery greater by remaining longer near you. If I act like a boy forgive me, and remember this is the first great grief of my life. Give me your hands, Eden, and say good-speed!"

All her womanly sympathy was aroused. Her own eyes filled, and unsuspectingly she reached out both hands.

Instantly a sharp rattle from Gordon's heel pierced Daisy's tender flank, and with a tremendous spring she leaped forward.

Unprepared as she was, Eden was jerked sharply backward, and a moment later her white, unconscious face lay upturned on the roadside.

A man stepped quickly from a clump of bushes and caught the frightened animal by the bit; while, leaping from his own horse, Gordon threw the bridle hastily to the fellow, while he sprang to Eden's side and raised her in his arms.

"I'm afraid I've overdone the thing!" he ejaculated. "If she should be dead! Here, Tom, open this gate. Is all in readiness?"

"Yes, sir."

With white face and compressed lips, Gordon passed through the gate with his insistent burden, carrying it up a curiously-concealed walk to the door of an oddly-constructed house.

The door opened from within, and closed again as Gordon passed through, followed by the noise of bolts and chains.

Up the broad stairway Gordon passed, and into a luxuriously-furnished apartment, where he carefully and gently deposited his burden upon a snowy bed.

And Eden was a prisoner in the hands of her worst enemy.

## CHAPTER XII.

WITH pale, anxious face, Wilfred Gordon bent above Eden, bathing her brow with fragrant lavender water, forgetting in his dread to kiss the sweet lips so temptingly near his own.

When he had almost abandoned hope of

being able to restore her through his own exertions, the delicate eyelids fluttered and unclosed.

"Thank Heaven!" murmured Gordon, fervently. "I was beginning to fear you were dead."

Eden smiled faintly.

"It was very stupid of me," she said, unsteadily. "Dick warned me before I left home that Daisy was unsafe to-day, but I forgot it just for the moment. I fell, did I not?"

"Yes."

"And you brought me here? How good of you! But where am I?"

"I don't know the people, but the lady is very kind. I hope you feel better."

"Oh, quite well, thank you, and so very sorry to cause you such trouble! Where is Daisy?"

"She ran away, and I was too much afraid for your safety to attempt to catch her."

"She has gone home then. How frightened dear Mrs. Marchmont will be! I must return at once."

"I'm afraid that will be impossible," stammered Gordon. "My own horse is gone. You cannot walk that distance."

"But I must, if needs be. How dreadfully disappointed Alice will be about the necklace!"

Involuntarily the small hands went up to the dainty throat.

A look of bewilderment, then dismay, grew in the beautiful eyes.

"Gone!" she cried, hoarsely. "Great heavens, Sir Wilfred, I have lost a necklace worth hundreds of pounds! Come, let us look where I fell. It must have dropped there. If I do not find it I am ruined."

The horror of the white face was pitiful, while the little, straying hands, searching in the folds of her habit, spoke eloquently of Eden's dreadful distress.

Gordon was disconcerted.

While he remained speechless, Eden slipped from the bed, and, lifting the skirts of her long clothes in her hand, stood expectantly.

"Come at once!" she cried, eagerly. "You will help me, will you not?"

He tried to rid his countenance of its shame, but the effort was fruitless.

"You are not well enough to go out in that sun again," he stammered, weakly. "Wait, it will be safe enough!"

"That is absurd. If you will not go with me I must go alone."

She started from the room, but as she would have passed Gordon he caught her hand.

"Eden," he said, unsteadily, "forgive me, dear. I don't wish to make you do anything that you don't wish to do, but I insist that you are not well enough to leave this room yet."

Something in the tone struck her as unusual, and with a quick glance into the shrinking face, Eden read the truth.

She staggered as though from a blow, and sank into a chair, her face ghastly distorted.

"You mean—that I am a—prisoner?" she gasped, hoarsely.

Almost before the sentence was completed Gordon was upon his knees beside her.

"Forgive me!" he cried. "Love has carried me to this extremity. I could not endure the thought of losing you. Oh, Eden, if you knew—"

"Silence!" she exclaimed, strength returning with the realisation of the necessity for action. "Had your love been true or honest you would have died ere placing me in a position so false, so compromising! Sir Wilfred, if you have any regard for me, any pity for a friendless and unprotected girl who has already suffered more than she can bear, I beseech you to release me from this place at once."

"I cannot!" he answered, dully. "Love—the first love of my life has changed me into a shrinking coward. I cannot let you go until you do so as my wife."

"Never!" cried Eden, vehemently. "I would die first! I see it all now. You are the accomplice of that vile woman who ruined my life, and who is at Marchmont Villa now for the purpose of betraying its master. The story you told me was all an odious falsehood, invented to work upon my sympathy that you might the more easily accomplish your infamous purpose. And, worse than all, you are a thief who has stolen the necklace from about my throat!"

She paused for want of breath, her dark eyes blazing with indignation.

Gordon did not move from his kneeling attitude.

"I have deserved that and more," he answered, humbly. "But it is too late to redeem the past or change the future. Heaven knows I would conceal what I can from you if I could, but it is impossible. I have known nothing all my life but to be what you know me to be. There has been but one pure impulse in my leprous heart—my love for you. Believe me all false if you will but that. I love you!"

"And I loathe, I abhor you! If that is not sufficiently strong, combine every epithet of hatred and contempt that every language of the world affords. Had you come to me and in a manly, honest way told me the history of your life, I should have pitied you. I should have put out my hand to you, and if a sisterly regard, an earnest affection, could have assisted you again to the place among men that you have lost, I would have given it gladly. But you come to me with a vile lie upon your lips, and when you have aroused my sympathy you take advantage of the opportunity it offers to cause an accident that might have cost me my life—for that you did cause it I am convinced. That you follow with abduction, and abduction with the vilest, most contemptible of crimes—theft! Ah," with a shiver of disgust, "there is not upon earth a man more unworthy the title than you!"

Gordon had risen, and was leaning with graceful calm against a massive cabinet, but the most unobtrusive could have readily detected the effort his calmness cost.

A red spot burned in either cheek, the eyes glittered with an expression that was not anger, yet was untranslatable. The lips twitched with a nervous convulsion that evidenced how deep his emotion was.

He never removed his gaze from her flushed, passionate face.

"Do you think your words anger me?" he asked, in a curiously dense voice. "They cut like the lash of a whip and with the same humiliating torture, but that is all. They do not lessen my love, nor could anything you might say do so."

"Are you speaking the truth?"

Some gleam of hope had come to the girl's face which Gordon did not read aright.

"I swear it!" he replied, earnestly.

"Prove it! Release me from this place, restore that necklace to me, and I will erase this hour from my memory. I will give you as loyal a friendship as woman ever offered to man."

Gordon's face fell.

"You ask the one thing I am incapable of granting," he answered, dully. "I cannot make so great a sacrifice. Ask anything else, and it will be yours upon the instant."

Eden flung out her hands wearily.

For the first time the utter helplessness of her position seemed to fully develop before her, and an intolerable horror filled her.

She endeavoured to conceal her terror, but it was a useless effort.

(To be continued.)

At the present day throughout the vast Russian Empire the tax-collectors have authority to whip the peasants who not pay, and to continue to whip them until they do pay. They may beg, borrow, or steal, but they must pay the taxes or be whipped to death.

## THE EYES OF THE PICTURE.

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### CHAPTER XXVIII.

VIOLET HERBERT never forgot the waking of the next morning. She could not understand it. To wake with a springing hope, with an intense relief—not to dread the daylight, the faces to be seen, the words to be heard; to seek for the shadows, to look all round for them, and see only light—to wonder if it were possible they would not roll back again and cover her from the sunshine—what did it all mean?

She lay in a sort of dreamy languor, looking at all the pretty familiar objects in her room—not feeling Violet Herbert, but someone else. She wondered if this were happiness, and if it were, whether she ought not to think more of that miserable soul that had gone out than of her own release? She might if she were very good, she thought; but she had not energy enough to decide. She could only give herself up to that curious feeling of peace that wrapped her all round as a mother's arms her child.

When she went down one of the first things she did was to write to her lawyer, in the midst of which Erlscourt came in—wanted to know what she was writing; and when she told him, hesitatingly, that it was to ask her lawyer to act for her in all concerning the dead man he swept up the letter—he would see to that.

She flushed scarlet.

"Leigh, you have done enough," she said.

"I don't think so. I will take care your wishes are obeyed, and I promise you I will only act by deputy—probably through my lawyer. But I will not have you seem to have the slightest concern with it." He had spoken sternly, now he added more softly,—

"Have I no rights in this, Violet? Is it not my place to guard your name?"

Violet acknowledged in her heart that he had the right to say that no man should be able to say Erlscourt's wife had had part or lot with Gilbert Venner. Erlscourt, in his chivalrous respect for her, would not use that plea just now in so many words, but he meant it, and Violet gave way.

So Erlscourt's own lawyer had his instructions. His client said carelessly he had known Venner well, and he did not want the parish to bury him.

The lawyer, not surprised at any such action in Erlscourt, suggested that the dead man's effects would pay expenses.

"I don't suppose he has left any," was the answer; "and if he had, let the police or the parish, or whoever it is, have them."

But of course it was Violet who paid for everything—about that there had been no dispute.

"Are you going to the inquest, Mr. Challoner?" asked Greville, the day after Venner's death. "It takes place to-morrow. I am going."

"Yes," said Challoner, "I am going."

And on the way to the inquest he confided to Greville that he was a little fidgety about it—not sure that Leigh might not have been mixed up with the raid.

"He wasn't there," said Greville, who by this time had heard a good deal from Leigh himself, though not the actual truth.

"Perhaps not. I hope it will be a lesson to you young men," said the lawyer, severely, "not to frequent such disreputable places—they are nothing less."

Greville had to bear the blame, both of himself and Leigh. He would have given up the club as soon as he was engaged to Dora had he not helped his friend. And as for Leigh, Greville knew his purpose to some extent.

Poor Emily sat at home in an agony, though she was not very clear as to how Leigh could be implicated, or, if implicated, how punished.

As a matter of fact, he was not implicated

at all. Hilliard said Venner was hit in the scull—by whom could not be decided. He held his tongue about anything else. The two other constables said the same, adding that they thought Venner was drunk.

Hilliard, recalled, merely said he had not observed that, his tone implying that it might have been so—which was, of course, not a contradiction.

So the jury considered the deceased had been drinking; and the medical evidence attributing death to the injuries received in that scuffle, they came to the conclusion that deceased died from the effects of a blow, and acquitted the police of all blame.

Then the coroner gave the order for burial, and a grey-haired gentleman arose in court, giving his name, and announcing himself as a solicitor, and stated that, with the coroner's permission, he would charge himself with the arrangements for the funeral of the deceased. A few questions elicited nothing more than that he was acting under instructions.

Challoner, turning hot and cold, whispered to Greville,—

"What the deuce does it all mean? That fellow is Leigh's lawyer."

"Well, but," said Greville, imperturbably, "Leigh isn't his only client, is he?"

"Nonsense! there are other things," answered Challoner, with a vagueness not to be expected in one of Her Majesty's counsel. "I can't make it out."

The coroner made no objection, and that very afternoon Edgar Marsden was buried in a quiet spot in a North London cemetery. No one was present besides the chaplain and sexton, save Erlacourt's solicitor.

The day had turned lowering, and a drizzly rain fell drearily all the afternoon; not a flower laid on the coffin, not a throb of pain in any heart, not a tear in the eyes that gazed moodily on the name of the dead laid in his last resting place.

It might have been different. There might have been a long regret in many hearts, there might have been tears falling from wistful eyes; but he had not deserved more than this—decent respect, and a grave that might have been forgotten if deep wounds did not at times ache with the old pain.

Erlacourt, waiting at the solicitor's office that dreary afternoon till the latter returned, heard that all had been done as he wished.

Greville was with him—Greville who, in that studio where so many happy hours had been passed and careless talk rippled on, had heard why his help had been wanted, and been thanked as he liked best. Greville knew what the grave, downcast face and the long sigh meant with which his friend listened to the lawyer.

"Thanks," said Erlacourt, in a low voice; then added, half to himself, "That page is closed."

Out again in the gloomy streets—there is not very much that is as gloomy as a wet summer afternoon.

Greville, always sympathetic, walked on, waiting, as it were, for the other to give the lead.

Erlacourt seemed thinking; but suddenly he drew his hand from Greville's arm, where it had rested.

"I am going to my sister's," he said.

"I thought you were going to Vane street?"

"I know you did. No, I can't—not to-day. I am afraid of myself, and I could not bear to meet her. Will you go for me, Grev? You have done so much for me already."

"Hush, Leigh! Could I do too much?"

"That is what you all say. I don't know what I have done to deserve all this love. Well, tell her just what you heard Duncan say. She will know why I do not come."

They parted. Erlacourt had not very much idea how he should tell his story—none at all how Emily would take it. He had to tell it for Violet's sake, and for justice sake towards those who loved him, and whose love he had tried hardly.

He found them sitting in the study—Emily

and her husband—for it was now vacation time, and Challoner was at home.

Both started up with such glad greeting that Erlacourt was deeply touched.

"I haven't deserved such a welcome," he said. "I have given you reason enough to doubt me; but, thank Heaven, I can clear that up now!"

"You've some love left for us," said Emily, still holding him, and looking up smiling into his face—half a jest, and half another meaning in the words. But to-day Erlacourt was not in the mood to resent the reproach—too softened, seeing all love through the medium of the one supreme love.

"I never lost it," he said. "You know that, Mentor!"

The gentle answer made Emily half-ashamed. She told him to sit down, and resumed her own chair.

"You're not in any difficulty about this club, are you?" said Challoner, with kindly anxiety.

"Not as you mean," was the grave answer. "I had nothing to do with the raid. I had left before the police got in."

"You were there, then?" exclaimed Challoner. "I was half afraid of it, and went to the inquest on Venner to see if anything was said about you."

"It was very good of you," said the young man, gratefully. "No; I had nothing to do with that. What I came to explain was why I went to the club at all. You were afraid for me—naturally. What I went for was not the play—though I did play—but to get out of this very Gilbert Venner a secret he held, and I meant to know."

"What do you mean, Leigh?" said Emily, in utter surprise; and Challoner said,—

"What could Venner's secrets have to do with you? Isn't he the man that was at the Danby's one night?"

"Yes, the same man. Well," said Erlacourt, with excessive quietness, "Gilbert Venner's real name was Edgar Marsden, and he was the husband of Violet Herbert."

"What!" from Emily; but Challoner was silent, looking at the face opposite him.

That one ejaculation was the only sound that was heard in the room for some seconds.

"That surprises you?" said Erlacourt at last, looking up, and with irrepressible bitterness in his tone. "You see for once in a way intuition was right."

"But she was living apart from him," said Emily.

"Is that, then, a sign-manual of evil? Is it always the woman's fault? How cruel you good women are sometimes! I suppose if I tell you she had a wretched childhood, that at sixteen she met this Marsden, believed him, trusted him, loved him, because she had never known any love at all; that he married her, that he denied her a year after, told her she was no wife—never had been; that she never saw him from that day till she saw him dead in the hospital—I suppose then you will say she was the winner, not the sinned against, that, somehow, the wrong was hers? I wonder, in Heaven's name, why you women, who have never known an evil thought even, are so merciless!"

"Leigh! hush!" said Challoner, but gently. He sympathized with the indignant outburst. "How was it Mrs. Herbert was in any doubt about her marriage? There are always proofs."

"There were not in this case, save what he had." He described the marriage in the Welsh village, and how it was that Violet was ignorant of even the place. "She told me everything one day," he went on; "at least I made her. She would have sent me away, refused to see or speak to me again. It is my doing, not hers, that we are not now as strangers. If I say so much of what should be between ourselves, it is to show you, Emmie, that Violet is not a scheming adventuress, but the purest-souled woman I ever knew!"

And still Emily sat silent, longing, perhaps,

to have nothing between her boy and herself, her prejudice melting before his impassioned vindication, but yet too proud to yield at once.

Possibly if Leigh had taken a different course he might have conquered her sooner, but the smouldering anger of weeks had caught fire and must blaze out.

"How did you know," asked Challoner, "that Venner and Marsden were the same? And how did you get these proofs?"

Erlacourt told in outline how he had discovered Venner to be Marsden, and also how he had obtained the proofs. Brief and bald as he purposely made the recital, it was enough to cause the lawyer to shake his head, half disapproving violence, half admiring the indomitable spirit, and Emily to cry out,—

"Oh! Leigh, you might have killed him!"

"I should have killed him," said Erlacourt, with his dark eyes aglow, "but for Violet. Well, the man is dead now—he cannot hurt her more—let him be. I want to shut out his very memory if I can. I would never have spoken his name again if it had not been that you must know—you two—why I seemed to be drifting away. You think I went too far, Arthur? I have broken the law; I have run a risk. Well, but you have not stood by and seen the woman you would die for breaking her heart under a shame that to her was real—that might have been real. If you had, you would cast custom and law to the winds, as I did, and welcome the risk. You would do it now, for all the years that lie between us."

"Well, I don't know," said Challoner, with a curious little smile. "I know that I'm very proud of you."

And Emily said under her breath, "Poor thing!" thinking of the woman lonely through long years—lonely and ashamed, and her girlish love shattered. How could she help loving this clear-eyed, loyal-hearted man, who threw around her the strength of a passion that was emptied of self? Even to Emily's soul, narrowed to a set rote and rule of propriety, there seemed no sin in such a love. And yet, was this quite the wife for her brother? Sin there was not, but there had been the seeming of it.

Erlacourt rose.

"I have had my say," he said. "You know now that I am no worse than I was. As for a card, I shall never touch one again. I am soul-sickened with them."

"Thank you for coming at once to tell us," said Challoner, with his hand on his brother's shoulder. "I need not ask what you are going to do about this most deeply-wronged lady. What would you like us to do?"

"Ah!" said the other quickly, "I have no doubt of you," and his eyes went to his sister, standing apart. "Heaven bless you, Arthur; you were always a brother to me. My poor darling! I cannot worry her now with any wishes of mine!"

He went to his sister.

"Good-bye, Emmie," he said, stooping for her kiss, "I am going."

She held his hands tightly.

"Not yet," she said. "Stay an instant. Violet loves you very much."

It flashed across him how impossible it was for this medium nature to gauge the love Violet could feel.

"One cannot measure love," he said. "I can only answer she would have borne all she could bear sooner than have me do as I have done."

"And you loved her enough to disobey—well enough to do all you could to prove her another man's wife?"

"It was her I loved," said Erlacourt, wincing under this questioning. "I ask nothing from you, Emmie. I would not force you to welcome her."

"Hush! Don't be so proud!" said Emily, half-crying and half-laughing. "I have been wrong, dear, and I have made you suffer. Forgive it. I will be hard and merciless no longer. I will love her because you do. I can't have a cloud between us. I am going to see her to-morrow."

"That's right," said her husband, with a suspicious unsteadiness of voice. But Erlscourt kissed his sister. "Dear old Mentor!" He could not say anything else.

"Poor boy!" said Challoner, when husband and wife were alone again. "It's a curious story. Who shall say there are no romances in real life? And what could knight have done more for his lady than he has done for her? You have done quite right, my dear"—to Emily, who cried quiet tears of relief. "I think I'll come with you and see this pretty flower that our boy wears in his heart."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

GLAD though he was, perhaps Erlscourt was a little nervous as to that meeting between his sister and Violet—Violet herself was certainly very nervous. But both misjudged Emily—both different degrees of ignorance. She was thoroughly warm-hearted, though that amiable quality was sometimes obscured by her prejudices; and in this case her heart took charge—no doubt partly because she was a good deal ashamed of her conduct in the whole matter, and was eager to atone for it. So that when Violet came into her drawing-room, where the two Challoners and Erlscourt waited, she was not left long in doubt as to the sort of reception she would be awarded.

She had hardly made a step from the door before she felt two motherly arms about her, and for the first time in many a long year the fair, tired young head rested on a friendly woman's heart.

Challoner was not behindhand in the earnestness of his greeting. He did not wonder, as he held the slim white hands, and that subtle charm of hers grew on him, at the "infatuation" Emily had grieved over. He acknowledged as true what his brother had said to him yesterday, "You would do it now—for all the years that lie between us." No service would seem too daring made for this sweet, stately woman.

She must come and stay with them, Emily said, with a touch—how rare in her!—of Leigh's impetuosity. They were quiet people, and Dora was still with them, and would be a charming companion.

All this speech gave Violet time to recover herself, for her first impulse had been to refuse the offer. She was for the time shattered by all she had gone through; and solitude, perfect quiet, looked enticing. To stay in a house with almost strangers—and one a prim person not prone to throw aside formalities—implied effort, a certain amount of conventionalism.

A minute's thought corrected what would have been a mistake; and, scarcely looking at Erlscourt to see if he approved—did she not know he would?—she accepted the invitation.

Erlscourt lingered when the others had gone—held her in his arms, and wanted to tell her—tried to tell her, how glad he was, but he faltered at every word, and gave it up.

Gone doubt and temptation and the dread looking into empty years—honour and love taking their place. How was the full heart to speak, save in silent fashion?

Dora was wild with delight when Violet came, even though the young lady was busy in preparations for her approaching wedding, which was to take place at her father's house in the country.

Violet must come too, she decreed, before the second day was over. This was announced first to Greville, who acquiesced meekly, as became his position; and a hearty invitation from the Gloucestershire squire conquered Violet's scruples.

In the meanwhile she rallied in the peaceful routine of the Hamilton-terrace-house. Erlscourt's frequent visits and Dora's liveliness saved it from the monotony that would have fretted her.

She was thankful beyond words for the restful feeling that took possession of her, for lying down at night without gladness that one more day was over; rising in the morning

without dread of the coming hours; very quiet and subdued, welcoming Erlscourt with the soft smile that was to him worth a kingdom. No one but he gave her credit for being so utterly content as she was.

"I do all I can for her," said Emily; "perhaps we are too quiet."

"Let her alone," said Erlscourt; "it is the best thing. She cannot understand peace—that is all."

So she was let alone. Challoner, of course, was, meanwhile, her devoted servant very soon; and though it was not in Emily to maintain extremes, Violet got on with her a great deal better than Leigh did.

She might be as sensitive as he, but she was a woman, and less vulnerable against another woman. She had feminine finesse; and, besides, she had no old associations of authority and kindness to tie her down, as he had.

Little by little she lost her air of depression, becoming more alert, like a person who has hopes and objects, and cares a great deal for life. The household life was a revelation to this social wall. The love that had been a saviour took brighter hues; hitherto there had always been a shadow on it, dear as it was. Now she had the right to love—now she could bring no shame to her lover, and her very step grew lighter.

She would know all about the club case, which was now proceeding, after some delays. There were, of course, constant remands, which protracted the matter almost up to the date fixed for Dora's marriage.

It ended sensationally, for at the final appearance of the defendants George King was missing—to the profit of the newspapers and the rage of the man who had been foolish enough to stand bail for him. Search resulted in failure, and nothing further over was heard of him that could be relied on as true.

Some rumour came that he was living in a somewhat "shady" part of Paris, keeping the same sort of establishment he had kept in London, only of a lower character, and frequented by a commoner class of people; but when communications were exchanged about him between the French and English police no person answering to George King's description could be found. So probably he had fitted elsewhere, and escaped the punishment his associates incurred.

And the club that had borne his name lost its identity with him, and being turned into a benevolent institution for poor ladies was a sort of satire on its former uses. Clergymen, ladies bountiful, charitable busybodies, struggling women of gentle birth now came and went through its doors and into the rooms one must think needed purifying, all unwitting of the silent tragedy those rooms might have spoken of.

But that was afterwards. Almost immediately after the trial came Dora's marriage—all brilliance and light-heartedness, and the bride announced to Violet when she was helping her to change her dress.

"I am coming to your marriage—whenever that is to come off. How glad I am"—with a rapturous embrace—"that Morton and I are to have that jolly old house so near Leigh's—and yours soon! Don't colour up, Violet. Morton says he couldn't get on at all away from his chum, as he calls him."

"And you are not jealous?" said Violet, smiling.

"What for? Dear fellow! he isn't less fond of me because he's fond of someone else," and off she went, happy as a bird.

And the next day the party broke up, and the Challoners came up to town—Violet with them, and Erlscourt, who of course acted as best man to his old schoolmate. Perhaps he missed Grev, who lingered on that honeymoon that can never come in its pristine glory but once. More likely he was tired of patience, and jealous that his darling should be so often on his sister's hearth instead of his own. And as the weeks went on his studio grew dull, and he listless at his work; and the only bright spot in the day was the evening spent in that

staid house—a thing that he had often considered rather a pittance.

One night he found his way to Violet's side, as he always did, while the two elders played backgammon. Violet, rousing herself from a reverie, began, after they had been silent awhile,—

"I told Emmie to-day I must go home, but she asked me to stay on. I think I had better go. She is very kind, but she will tire of me if I make such long stays. Don't look protesting!" she said, with a sauciness she had begun to show of late. "Everyone is not like you!"

"I haven't the chance to tire of you." Violet gave him a swift look, and coloured a little, while he, possessing himself of her hand, which trembled in his hold, added softly,—

"Have I waited long enough?"

"You have been very good," she said, gratefully. "You startled me because I have been so happy. I let things go, and never thought of a change. And perhaps"—she spoke with some hesitation—"I have been so tossed here and there that I shrink from crossing the threshold of something untried. I don't pain you, do I? You understand?"

"Perfectly. But remember, dearest, I shall lead you over that threshold; and, though I cannot keep trouble away, there will be something in bearing together whatever comes."

She looked into the glowing fire, with her brown eyes shining with perfect contentment. What pictures was she seeing there, full of beauty to the woman to whom home had been an unknown word? No girl of seventeen, wrapped in a first love, ever dreamed with more faith, more vivid hope.

"Yes," she said, still in that dream, her lips parting in a half smile, "bearing trouble together."

"What are you two talking about?" called Challoner, as the game finished, and he crossed over to the hearth. Erlscourt lifted his head proudly. "My dear boy," said Challoner, laughing, "you look as if you had been getting your own way. Oh, I see! Well, I'm glad; but, my child"—kissing her clear cheek—"you'll have to be married from this house, and I'll give you away," which was of all things what Erlscourt had desired.

As to Emily, sensible woman though she was, she was in raptures—her steady-going raptures—at having so soon a second wedding to arrange for.

Simple as this was, quiet as Violet had begged it might be, the church was crowded—there had been no possibility of letting the bride have her wish. A rising artist and a general favourite was likely to have many friends, known and unknown. Of course, his brother artists came (Greville and Dora among them), and also people of a social rank above his own, and whom he only knew professionally, or in a formal society way. Besides, there was curiosity to see the unknown bride of a man whom everyone said was going to be great. They were not disappointed.

A dowager potent in society said, dropping her eyeglass,—

"She's charming; she'll do very well for that handsome Erlscourt, and I shall ask her to my receptions."

"Just the sort of woman you might fancy he'd marry," said some of the artists; "something about her picturesque and more striking than ordinary good looks."

Yet if Violet had been nervous of just this criticism she did not think of it at all as she knelt by Erlscourt's side. What she did think of was a dimly lighted cottage room, of a terrible tempting river, of a prison-cell, and a lonely grave. And when these thoughts weighed on her and oppressed her she lifted her large eyes half in terror, half in appeal, and met the look, tender and protesting, that strengthened and calmed her.

She was not such a bride as Dora had been—not blithe and buoyant, and sparkling with smiles. She came, stepping softly, with downcast eyes, clinging a little to the hand holding



["I THINK OF THE OLD TIMES VERY OFTEN, LEIGH, HAPPY AS I AM!" SAID VIOLET.]

hers; but what a gracious presence, what a subdued radiance over this face the other had not known!

There is a happiness that belongs not to youth nor inexperience—altogether of a different sort—that you cannot attain unless you have come through deep waters. And only Greville knew how deep those waters had been—only he of all that throng could have guessed at that flash of memory, and interpreted her upward look.

No one else could dream that this fair woman, who was the wife of a great artist to be, could have a past she would not have anyone know.

Dora was curious when, the very next day, her husband went to Erlscourt's house, and superintended the removal of "Forsaken" to a small room seldom used, opening from the studio, where already some few other paintings hung.

"But why hide it?" she said, half indignantly. "It's one of the loveliest things he ever did! And he not only declares he won't exhibit it again, but sticks it away in an art lumber-room—it's nothing else—" with a withering look round.

"His friends can always see it here," said Greville, imperturbably; "and the connoisseurs."

"I should think he would want to see it himself. The eyes are like Violet's, though I couldn't see it at first. It's a shame!"

"No, it isn't!" said Greville, gravely. "And you musn't say that to Violet. Erlscourt asked me the night before he was married to see that this picture was moved. He can't bear to part with it, but he can't bear to see it often—and Violet certainly not. I can't say more, Dora dear!"

Dora's eyes grew very soft as she nestled to her husband's side, comprehending enough to make her sympathetic, and thankful that she had no such shadows to look back on as Violet.

And, perhaps, in truth, Violet never quite recovered the strain of that seven years. She had always about her that curious grave sweet-

ness one sometimes sees in people who have suffered much, but have not been hardened.

She was speedily the adored of all Erlscourt's artist friends, who came and went just as they had done when he first came back to England.

There was open house all the same—well, not quite the same, for, though there was as much freedom, there was still a nameless order that showed the woman's presence.

To Violet the life was a sort of heaven. Everything she did daily was a pleasure, from the long mornings of work in the studio—the most loved pleasure of all—to the most trivial daily duty.

Emily said it was not a sufficiently regular household. She couldn't imagine how Violet could endure it. She never knew who was in it, or who was coming to dinner.

Dora, who heard this, went into peals of laughter, and she declared it was a delicious house. And a much humbler person than Mrs. Greville also thought the same, and practically said it; for when Lucie was at last prevailed on to bestow her hand on the too patient Hillyard it was only on condition that she should remain in her mistress's service.

"You'll want someone about you you can trust, ma'am," said she. "You go out so much, and your time is so taken up between the master and all the people here."

"I should like to keep you very much," said Violet, "but I don't know —"

Then she suddenly sprang up with an excitement unusual to her.

"I have it, Lucie! You shall have your trousseau, as I always said you should, and Hillyard the money to furnish my husband told him he'd give him. All the same—wait till I come from my ride—there are the horses!" for Lucie had been dressing her mistress for riding; and Violet ran down, to be swung into her saddle by Erlscourt, and to begin at once to tell him her plan, which, of course, he approved.

The result was that Lucie and Hillyard were married, and the former kept her position in the household, and the latter took the place

of the somewhat unsatisfactory person who had acted as factotum, and turned out a treasure.

"You see we never can be too grateful to him," said Violet, when this arrangement took effect; and it was the first time she had alluded since her marriage to what had passed before it. "I think of those times very often, Leigh, happy as I am."

Erlscourt laid down palette and brush to draw her within his arm.

"I know you do," he said; "and you were looking at that picture yesterday!"

"I didn't know you were near; but I can't help it sometimes."

"Don't do it again, darling!" he said. "Neither you nor I want to part with that picture; but yet it always brings up bitter memories."

"Not all bitter to me. You forget," said Violet, softly, "that it was you who saved me—you who were guided, I verily believe, to create that dumb witness! And I like to look at it now and then just to be sure that that is Violet, and this the same Violet—your Violet."

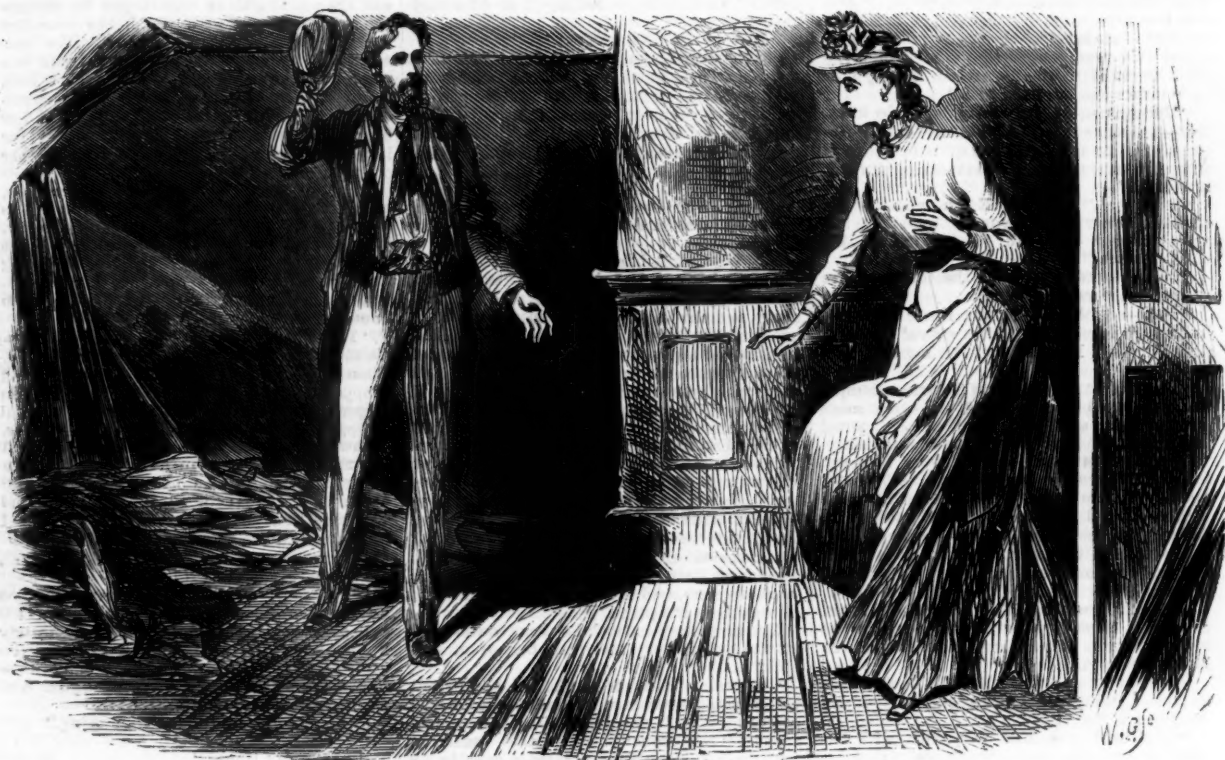
"Somehow I think she was always my Violet—from the very first," said Erlscourt. "Perhaps I try too much to keep you from a sorrowful thought; and you, better than I, are also wiser. I remember what George Eliot says about forgetting sorrow, and I think it true; yet I always want you to be quite happy."

Her eyes were looking up into his as he spoke. There had been tears in them then—there were tears in them now—those the hot tears of shame and anguish; these only making sweeter the mute, loving question,—

"Am I not happy?"

He stooped to kiss those eyes—it was the only answer he could make—put her aside gently, and went back to his easel. And Violet, sitting quietly near him, watched the work, and praised, and criticised, and wondered, womanlike, if she loved him enough who had loved her to the uttermost!

[THE END.]



[THE MAN RAISED HIS BATTERED OLD HAT WITH A COURTEOUS BOW TO ANICE!]

## NOVELETTE.]

## THE IVY HOUSE.

—:—

## CHAPTER I.

In the pretty drawing-room of a house in a fashionable London square two ladies were sitting, laughing and chatting, while they drank their afternoon tea out of cups of delicate china, and toyed daintily with the luscious scarlet strawberries that were piled up on a dish set in the middle of the table, with their due complement of sugar and cream beside them.

One of these ladies was clearly, from her attire, a visitor; the other, who played the part of hostess, was a dark-haired, dark-eyed beauty, exquisitely dressed in some wonderful tea-gown of pale-green plush, which was adorned with a long spray of tea-roses that stretched from her left shoulder half across her corseage, and contrasted admirably with the soft, clear carnation of her complexion.

"Well, if you will allow me the privilege of friendship, I have no hesitation in declaring you the most incomprehensible creature I ever met!" said the fairer one, putting her cup down with emphasis. "To refuse an Earl—rich, handsome, charming! why, it is downright insanity!"

Anice Seymour laughed—a little rippling laugh as pleasant to the ear as a peal of silver bells. But she said nothing.

"But surely, Anice, you do care for some one," said her friend, rather insistently. "Girls don't live twenty-two years in the world without having fancies?"

A dreamy expression came into the girl's lovely eyes. She seemed to be looking away from Edith Devereux, either into the grey mists of the past, or the still greyer mists of the future, and it was fully a minute before she spoke.

"I think you are right, Edith. Girls don't

live to the age of twenty-two without having fancies, and I am no exception to the rule. I have never spoken of this to anyone before, and I dare say you'll laugh when I tell it you now. You'll say I am silly and sentimental, and that you are surprised at me, and all the rest of it—"

She broke off a little nervously, but Mrs. Devereux laid a gentle hand on her arm.

"Try me, my dear! I think I know you better than to accuse you of any sickly sentiment."

"Very well! Then you shall hear my romance—rather a mild romance, by the way, and one that took place three years ago, so that it will have none of the effect of novelty."

"It happened one afternoon in November, and I had been out shopping with my maid. I had stayed later than I intended, and it had grown dark and very foggy, so foggy that you could hardly see your hand before you."

"I was stupid enough to go down a narrow side street because I thought it would take me home sooner, and before I had gone many yards I was attacked by two horrible-looking men, one of whom held me while the other wrenched off my gold bracelets, and a rather valuable brooch I was wearing."

"Although I was frightened I was by no means inclined to submit quietly, so I called out for help until the wretch put his hand over my mouth and nearly suffocated me, and then I was perforce quiet."

"But a second later a young man appeared—it sounds like a novel, doesn't it?—and with one blow he knocked down the man who had got my bracelets, and who fell like a log on the pavement."

"My other assailant was more difficult to tackle. He was tall and strong and showed fight; but after a few minutes he seemed to think discretion was the better part of valour, so he took to his heels, leaving his luckless companion in the mud, and my rescuer gave me back my jewellery, advising me to hide it in my pocket."

"Then he asked me where I lived, and, when I told him, said he would see me safely home; so he drew my arm through his, and we set off, my maid following close behind."

"The distance was not great, and we did not say much, but I think, even at this length of time, I could repeat every word he uttered. I wanted him to come in and let papa thank him when we arrived home, but he wouldn't, and bade me a brief good-bye, and I have never seen him since!"

She ended with a nervous laugh, that was meant to cover a certain degree of emotion with which she had spoken. It is likely enough that Mrs. Devereux inwardly thought she had attached a good deal of importance to a commonplace enough incident; but she was discreet, and kept this opinion to herself.

"Was the man a gentleman?" she asked.

"Yes; and more than that, a handsome one—in point of fact, I think he was the handsomest man I have ever seen. He was very fair, with blue eyes, and a crop of close-cut golden curls; but it was not his looks that struck me so much as his expression. He looked like a man face to face with despair. He was pale and haggard, and there was a sort of hunted look in his eyes that has haunted me ever since—indeed, so strong was the impression it made on me that as we were saying 'good-bye' I said to him, 'You are in trouble?' He bowed his head, without speaking, and then—well, then I said I was sorry for him, or something of the sort, and he looked at me in a way that brought tears into my eyes. Then he kissed my hand and was gone."

"And you have never seen him since?"

"No."

"Nor heard of him?"

"No. I do not even know what his name was. I might have asked him, but in my excitement I forgot to do so. I don't suppose," Anice added, rather sadly, "that we shall ever meet again."

"I don't suppose you will," agreed Mrs.

Devereux, with cheerful acquiescence. "And this being the case, my dear Anice, don't you think it is rather foolish of you to be dreaming of this man, and letting eligible offers go by, when it is more than likely that by now he is either dead or married?"

"Perhaps so—I can't tell; but I do know this—no other man has ever made the least impression on me, and I am quite determined that I won't marry without caring for my husband!"

"I suppose," observed Edith, with a touch of satire in her voice, "you are under the impression that you are in love with this shadowy ideal?"

Anice winced a little at the tone, but she replied quite steadily.

"I agree with Shakespeare, that 'He never loved who loved not at first sight.' Yes, in plain English, I am in love with my unknown hero."

Mrs. Devereux snapped her fingers contemptuously, and helped herself to some more strawberries; and just then the door opened to admit a tall, grey-haired man of middle age, whose likeness to Anice proclaimed him her father. He held a newspaper in his hand, and as he came in adjusted his spectacles.

"I've found exactly the house you'll like, Anice," he observed, after greeting Mrs. Devereux. "It is advertised to be let furnished, so that will suit us beautifully. Listen!"

"To let, furnished, attractive old-fashioned residence, standing in its own grounds, in the midst of lovely scenery, and close to the sea. Rent moderate."

"What do you think of that?" asked Mr. Seymour, triumphantly, turning from his daughter to her visitor.

"I think," said Mrs. Devereux, with the wisdom born of much experience, "that between a newspaper advertisement and the actual house lies a great gulf, which only an agent's imagination could bridge over. Doubtless you'll find a tumble-down old tenement, given over to rats and mildew, and furniture that not even a Wardour-street collector would buy."

About a week later Mr. and Miss Seymour called at the office of the house-agent, whose name was appended to the bottom of the advertisement that had attracted them, and asked for an "order to view" the Ivy House.

Both he and Anice were a little crestfallen at finding the house had been uninhabited for three years, for it seemed to sugar that it would not come up to the expectations its description had raised.

However, they determined to see it and judge for themselves; and when, an hour afterwards, they were driven through an avenue of fine old trees, and the carriage stopped in front of the hall door, Anice gave a little cry of surprised delight, for certainly nothing could be prettier than the grey, old-fashioned building, with its twisted stacks of chimneys, its casement windows, and its close clinging mantle of ivy!

"Oh, father, is it not charming?" she exclaimed, enthusiastically. "It looks like some enchanted palace in a fairy tale, with all the inhabitants asleep!"

"It looks precious gloomy," was Mr. Seymour's remark, and the comment was a just one.

A curious sort of silence hung about the house like a pall—an effect that was perhaps partly due to the many trees surrounding it, which had been left unpruned for so long that their branches had spread out, and interlaced until hardly a gleam of sunlight could penetrate through the leafy barrier. The ivy, too, strengthened the impression of gloom, which was further added to by the massive strength of the great oaken door, thickly studded as it was with out-iron nails.

To Anice's romantic fancy the place looked an ideal residence; but her father's more prosaic mind was much inclined to vote it damp and unhealthy.

"Perhaps the back is livelier than the

front?" said Anice, consolingly, as he stated his objections.

"That, of course, looks out on the sea."

She it was who pulled the hanging bell, and she was a little startled at the effect produced, for the peal echoed through the house with a hollow, reverberating sound that was certainly the reverse of cheerful.

After some delay, and a good deal of clanking of iron bolts and chains, the door was opened, and a short, dark woman, very broadly built, and with strongly-marked features, stood on the threshold, glowering at the intruders.

Nothing daunted by this repulsive apparition—who she rightly judged to be the housekeeper—Anice presented the agent's order, and she and her father thereupon were ushered into the dining-room—a large, but extremely dusty apartment, with the carpet rolled up into one corner, and the chairs piled one upon another close to the wall.

So far as the rooms were concerned there was no fault to be found, for they were large, and of fine proportions; and though the furniture was old-fashioned, and sadly in need of a housemaid's ministrations, it was nevertheless handsome and good of its kind. It is true the sense of eerie gloom that hung over the outside was observable in the interior of the mansion also; but, as Anice remarked, some fresh curtains and bright flowers would work wonders, and she herself was curiously interested in the place.

The housekeeper shook her head ominously as the young lady delivered herself of this opinion.

"Ah, miss, I expect you'd tell a different tale if you'd lived here for a month or two—or even a week," she said, in her deep, gruff tones. "It's about the loneliest, dreariest, wretchedest place I ever came a-near in all my days."

"Then why do you stay here?" asked Anice.

"Because I've got my living to get, and them as has their livings to get mustn't pick and choose. If I could help it I wouldn't be here another week. Loneliness isn't the worst either; there's other things as well," mysteriously.

"Other things! What other things?"

The woman looked round timorously, and drew a step nearer her questioner.

"Spirits, miss!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Anice and Mr. Seymour in a breath.

"But I do assure you it's the truth. The house is haunted!"

## CHAPTER II.

ARRR such a warning it may be thought surprising that Anice and her father should not have decided to give the Ivy House a wide berth; but, as a matter of fact, the young girl's interest was strongly aroused in the place, and the details given by Mrs. Pole only served to increase this interest.

So far from being superstitious, both father and daughter laughed at the idea of "ghosts"; moreover, neither of them placed implicit confidence in the good faith or veracity of the housekeeper, who, it seemed pretty clear, had no desire that the house should find a tenant. Consequently they informed the agent of their willingness to take the house for a period of six months, and about a fortnight after their first visit, they arrived from London to take formal possession.

In a few days Anice had effected a great change. What with fresh flowers, draperies of Eastern silk, a few bright-coloured rugs, some gold-embroidered screens, and three or four large palms, the house was quite transformed, and even Mr. Seymour declared himself pleased with it, while Anice was in a perfect ecstasy of delight at a home that promised to be so pleasant, and so far away from the society that worried her.

The country around was delightfully picturesque, in spite of its proximity to the sea,

and the young girl at once began to explore the various walks with which she intended making herself well acquainted. She was sauntering quietly along a country road one morning when her eye was caught by a long spray of honeysuckle that trailed its sweet-smelling clusters from a branch above her head. She tried to reach it—but vainly, for it was most provokingly just an inch farther off than she could stretch.

"Permit me!" said a voice at her side, which made her start, and turning round she beheld a man of eight or nine-and-twenty, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and dressed in a light tweed suit, who was admiringly regarding her. A bright flash sprang to her cheeks. She came forward impulsively, with both hands extended.

"I am so glad to meet you again!" she exclaimed, in her own frank, outspoken fashion. Then her face suddenly fell, and her hand dropped limply to her side. "Have you forgotten?" she added, with a sort of wistful disappointment, observing his blank gaze. "How you came to my aid in the fog when I was robbed by those men in Eaton-square three years ago?" An idea struck her, and she broke into a laugh. "How stupid I am! Of course, you would not recognise me, for I remember I had a thick veil on at the time."

He joined in the laugh, and took her hand, which she had again extended.

"You must forgive me for my apparent forgetfulness," he said, never removing his eyes from her face, which was still delicately flushed with excitement. "If I had seen you without your veil believe me there would have been no danger of my ever forgetting you. Are you visiting here, may I ask?"

"I am living here for the time being."

"Indeed! Where?"

"At the Ivy House."

He started a little, and his eyes fell. After a moment he said,—

"You surprise me. I did not know the Ivy House had a tenant. It has been empty for so long that there seemed little chance of its finding one."

"Yes, it seemed to have obtained an evil reputation in some way or another. I believe"—she began to laugh—"people said it was haunted!"

He did not echo the laugh, in fact, his face had suddenly grown pale and grave.

"Surely," she added, in surprise, "you do not believe in the report?"

"I don't know," he returned, a little uneasily. "Perhaps it is safer not to commit oneself to any opinion on such a subject."

"At any rate, it is more prudent," she observed, archly.

"Yes; although prudence is a virtue that is not very popular, I am afraid."

"I suppose it can't expect to be, from its very nature."

He smiled, and then took his place by her side.

So together they walked slowly along the pretty lane, with its high, luxuriant, unpruned hedges, where the convolvulus and honeysuckle were blossoming in generous profusion, and the banks were starred over with ragged robin and the white campion flowers.

"It is very delightful to me to meet you again," said the young man after a pause, stealing an admiring glance at her, in her fresh white dress, with its lines of delicate lace and ribbons, "still more delightful to think that in future we shall be neighbours."

"Then you live near here?"

"Yes, about a quarter of a mile from the Ivy House. My name is Gilbert Dering."

"And mine Anice Seymour."

After this they talked lightly and easily on a variety of different topics, and Anice found the walk much pleasanter even than she had anticipated when she had set out.

Only one incident disturbed it. As they neared the other end of the lane a man started forth from a gate against which he had been leaning, and seemed on the point of addressing Mr. Dering, when a stern glance and a

few low words from that gentleman made him shrink back with a muttered exclamation that might either have been a curse or an apology.

He was an ill-looking man, of middle age, dressed in a curious check suit, with a dark weather-tanned complexion, and sinister eyes, that glistened most atrociously.

"Not the sort of person one would care to meet on a dark night," observed Anice, with a smile, when they were well out of earshot.

"No, he is an unpleasant-looking vagabond—a seaman I should imagine from his appearance. Certainly he is a stranger in these parts, otherwise I should know him," Mr. Dering returned carelessly.

It was not until they reached the wide iron gates of the Ivy House that the two young people said good-bye to each other, and then it was with a promise from Gilbert Dering to call the following day, and pay his respects to Mr. Seymour—a promise that he religiously fulfilled.

After that it was quite a usual thing for him to drop in, either to smoke a cigar with the master of the house, or—as more usually happened—to have a chat with its mistress, between whom and himself an intimacy speedily grew up.

And yet, strangely enough, Anice was conscious of a sense of disappointment in her intercourse with him. It is true he was as handsome as the ideal with whom she had fallen in love at first sight, but there was, at the same time, something in his manner that she could not fathom—something that was full of sinister suggestions, and that took away the charm of his interesting conversation, even when he was most fascinating.

Only one event occurred to break the monotony of the next fortnight, and that took place a few days after Anice's meeting with Mr. Dering.

One morning, on returning from a walk, she found all her belongings had been summarily moved from the bedroom she generally occupied into another apartment which looked on the front of the house. On ringing the bell to inquire the reason of this extraordinary proceeding Mrs. Pole came in to explain.

"The fact is, miss," observed the housekeeper, "I wanted to have the sweeps in and give the oak chamber a thorough good cleaning—which it hasn't had for a long time, seeing as I had no idea before you came that you would go and choose the very oldest, and dirtiest, and most zackety room in the house for your bedroom"—this was said in an injured tone, and, indeed, Mrs. Pole had done her best to prevent Anice from selecting that especial chamber as her own. "So, as the kitchen chimney was swept this morning, I thought I couldn't do better than have yours done, and give the room a good cleaning up the same time."

"You have exceeded your duty!" said Anice, rather angrily, "and the next time you want to interfere with my arrangements I beg you will give me due notice!"

The housekeeper withdrew, muttering, and casting before she went a somewhat malevolent glance on the young lady.

As a matter of fact, there was no love lost between the two. Indeed, there had sprung up between them one of those natural antipathies that are as difficult to explain as they are hard to get rid of, and neither saw more of the other than their respective positions compelled.

Late that evening, as Anice was returning from a walk through the park, some impulse induced her to go round by the back of the house where it looked upon the sea.

It was an unusually dark night for the time of year, and the air was hot and close with a threatened thunderstorm. A peculiar stillness lay on earth and sea, and in it; each cracking of a twig, each rustling of a bough, was preternaturally distinct.

As the young girl advanced through a small plantation of trees she heard the low sound of voices, which immediately ceased on her

approach—but not before she had caught a glimpse of the speakers, one of whom was Mrs. Pole, and the other the self-same man who had started forward to speak to Mr. Dering a few days ago.

The man disappeared amongst the trees, and the housekeeper, seeing herself recognised, moved slowly towards the house.

"Who was the person you were talking to, Mrs. Pole?" asked Anice, coming quickly up level with her.

"Only a nephew of mine, miss, as has just come from off a long journey," was the reply, given in the stolid tones with which Mrs. Pole was wont to resent her young mistress's interference.

"Why does he not come and see you at the house instead of out here?"

"Because he's only a rough sort of man, and wouldn't care to be seen by any of the servants, I suppose. Aren't you going in, miss?" she asked, stepping on one side, so as to allow Anice to pass.

But the latter refused.

"No. It is so hot indoors that I shall stay here a little longer. I am going to sit on the seat on the cliff for half-an-hour."

One reason why the girl did not care to go into the house was that Mr. Seymour was away.

He had gone up to town in the morning, and would not return until the following day, therefore Anice was thrown on her own resources for companionship; and to-night she somehow did not feel inclined either for reading or working—perhaps the heat had made her feel unusually lazy.

The seat to which she went was placed almost on the edge of the cliff, and before her stretched the wide waste of waters, tipped here and there with phosphorescent brightness, but otherwise dark as the sky above. Presently, a few stars came out from between the rifts of the clouds, but their radiance was too vague and uncertain to illumine much, and Anice was considerably startled by seeing a sudden ray of light flash out across the waters.

It seemed to come from behind her, and the young girl hastily sprang from her seat and looked towards the house.

Then she saw that the illumination proceeded from the window of the room she usually occupied as a bed-chamber. It was by no means an ordinary kind of light either, for it burnt with a curiously steady, blue-white brightness that was unlike anything she had ever seen before, and had in it something weird and startling. Nor was this all. A shadow suddenly came between the light and the window, and remained for a few seconds distinctly outlined—the shadow of an old man with long, straggling hair and bent shoulders, who wrung his hands with a sort of helpless impotence, and then threw them aloft with a gesture full of despair. At the same moment a cry, loud, shrill, and unearthly, rang out on the night air, and simultaneously both light and figure disappeared, and the darkness remained like a heavy curtain.

### CHAPTER III.

STARTLED, and trembling a little with a dread of which she was almost ashamed, Anice rushed into the house, and was met on the threshold by a frightened parlour-maid, whose white cheeks told their own tale.

"Oh, Miss Anice! did you hear it?"

"Hear—what?"

"That scream—that awful scream?"

"Of course I heard it, and I mean to see whom it came from," returned Anice, with an assumption of courage she was really far from feeling. "Come upstairs with me, Eliza, and we will unravel the mystery."

"Oh, miss—I dare not!"

"What nonsense! There is nothing to be afraid of. No doubt we shall find a solution of the whole affair when we get into my bedroom, for the scream came from there."

"I know it did, miss. There is no other

room it could come from," murmured Eliza, shivering, and lowering her voice, while she drew a little nearer her mistress as if for protection. "For my part, miss, I never could make out why you slept there—in that room of all others."

"What is the matter with the room?"

"It's the one old Squire Dering was murdered in!"

It was now Anice's turn to grow pale, and it was a minute or two before she recovered sufficient self-control to speak.

"Is this really true?" she breathed at last.

"It's gospel truth, miss."

"How long ago is it since?"

"About three years, I should think; that's as near as I can say, and the house has had a bad name ever since."

"Was this Squire Dering any relation of Mr. Gilbert Dering?"

"His uncle. There was another nephew, too—Mr. Lionel Dering, and him it was as committed the murder—at least, so folks say."

"And what became of him—was he hanged?"

"No; he managed to escape out of prison while he was awaiting his trial, and no one about here has seen or heard of him ever since. I suppose he knew there was no chance of him getting off if he stayed for the trial; and, indeed, I don't see how there could have been a chance, for it was certainly him as killed the old man. You see, miss, it was like this. Mr. Lionel was his uncle's heir, and got into debt, and when he asked the old gentleman to pay his debts the Squire refused. One afternoon the two had a row, and Mr. Lionel went out, saying, 'If I can't get the money by fair means, then I must get it by foul.' The butler overheard him say the words, and afterwards they told against him terribly."

"He stayed out until late, and when he came in went straight to his bedroom without speaking to anybody. Now, his bedroom was next to the one you have been sleeping in, miss, and as you know, the two communicate by a door, which was always kept locked, and of which Mr. Lionel kept the key."

"It so happened that on that particular night the Squire himself had decided to sleep in the oak chamber—that is yours—because it had been raining, and the rain had caused a water-spout to overflow, and had made his own room damp."

"Well, in the morning he was found lying on the bed dead, and the curious part of it was that his door was locked on the inside, so that no one could possibly have got in except through Mr. Lionel's room; and Mr. Lionel had been sleeping there all night, and admitted that his own door leading to the passage was locked, and that the key of the one leading to the oak chamber had never been out of his possession. Of course, it was quite clear that no one but Mr. Lionel could possibly have got into the oak chamber, seeing that the window as well as the door was securely fastened on the inside. Then you hadn't got far to look for a motive, for Mr. Lionel was the squire's heir, and so it was to his advantage to get rid of the poor old gentleman."

Anice had listened to this long speech of the housemaid in perfect silence, and with deep interest. Now she asked—

"But how was the Squire murdered?"

"By chloroform, miss. A handkerchief that had been dipped in it was found stuffed in his mouth. He had been suffering a long time from heart disease, and Mr. Lionel knew that. You see, Mr. Lionel was a great naturalist, and was always collecting butterflies, and such like, and so he used chloroform for his insects, and often carried a little bottle about with him in his pocket. The doctors said that the poor old Squire did not suffer much—that was one good thing. And now, miss, I'm sure you won't want to go up into the oak chamber."

But this was exactly what Anice did want to do and what, in effect, she did. Finding that

Eliza would not come with her, she armed herself with a candle, and went boldly upstairs—not, however, without an inward quaking as she pushed open the door, and stood on the threshold of the dreaded chamber.

But all was quiet. A silence like that of the grave, rested on the room, whose furniture seemed to assume fantastic shapes in the gloom. There was not a sign either of light or of the so-called ghostly presence; and Anice, after making a thorough examination, went downstairs, hardly knowing what to think of the strange phenomena she had witnessed.

She could not explain it at all. Again and again she went over the incidents of the evening, but without being able to draw any conclusion from them. It was certain that she had not been the victim of a delusion, because although the phantom had not been seen by anyone but herself, the light had, and also the scream had been heard by Eliza and others of the servants. Looked at in any way, it was a mystery, and the more she pondered on it the more mysterious it became.

At last she went to bed, and she could not help being thankful that accident, in the shape of Mrs. Pole, had altered her sleeping apartment, for it would have been quite impossible for her to occupy the oak chamber, even though she kept on repeating to herself that she was not superstitious, and that there were no such things in the world as ghosts.

Naturally enough she could not sleep, but lay tossing on her bed, listening to the stable clock as it boomed out the hours. Twelve o'clock struck—one, and then she got up, and looked about for a book, but, as ill-luck would have it, she could not find one.

"I suppose I shall have to go downstairs and get one," she said to herself, as she put on a dressing-gown and thrust her small white feet into a pair of slippers. "It is a nuisance, but I would rather do anything than get back into bed, and lie there with nothing but my thoughts to occupy my mind."

And so she sallied forth into the passage, and it was not until she was outside that it occurred to her she would have to pass the door of the oak chamber in order to get down the staircase.

Her heart beat a little faster, but she kept bravely on, determining that she would not even look at the door of the room as she passed it.

Vain resolution! Some fascinating influence that she could not resist drew her eyes in that direction even against her will. What was the meaning of that faint, thread-like line of light that issued from between the interstices of the door, she wondered?

She came to a full stop, and shaded her candle with her hands, so as to make sure its flickering was not deceiving her. No; beyond doubt there was a light inside the room, and as she stood listening it seemed to her that she heard the faintest possible murmur of voices.

The voices gave her fresh courage. Ghosts do not talk, therefore it followed that the inhabitants of the room must be human beings like herself. She boldly advanced, and gently tried the door, but it was locked on the inside, and repelled her efforts to open it.

For a minute she stood in indecision, then she rapidly retraced her steps along the passage and through the corridor leading to the wing of the house occupied by the servants. At the butler's door she stopped, and rapped loudly.

"Millard!" she called out through the key-hole, "get up, there are burglars in the house!"

Luckily, Millard was a light sleeper, and it needed no further call to make him jump out of bed and slip on some clothes. In five minutes he was by the side of his young mistress, anxiously inquiring what was the matter.

As briefly as possible she told him what had happened, and together they made their way to the oak chamber.

"We may as well blow out the candle,

miss," observed Millard, "because anyone can see us from a good way off, and could aim at us if they were so minded, while without the light we can steal along without any risk of such a thing."

Accordingly Anice blew out the candle, and a minute after, while they were groping along in the dark, it seemed to her that something slipped past her—whether human being or not it was impossible to say.

Involuntarily she gave a little cry, and Millard asked what had frightened her. From his voice, which shook a little, she judged that he was not altogether in love with the situation.

"I thought something passed me," she said; then added, hastily, "but no doubt it was fancy."

"If it was, I fancied the same thing!" muttered the butler. "After all, perhaps we were wrong to put out the light."

His step after this was not so assured; nevertheless, when they reached the oak chamber, he went forward with as bold a front as he could muster and tried the door.

Greatly to his surprise it yielded at once, and he nearly fell headlong into the room, which was dark and quiet as the grave.

"Why, miss, the door ain't locked, and there's nobody inside, neither!" he remarked, in a reproachful voice to Anice, as he struck a wax vesta, and peered into the chamber.

Anice was dumbfounded. She followed him in, and assured herself that what he said was correct. No, there was certainly not anyone there.

"You had better go downstairs and see that all the doors are properly fastened," she said, with decision. "Maybe the persons who were in this room heard me try the door, and have escaped while I went to fetch you."

But this surmise was also proved to be wrong, for all the doors were exactly as Millard had left them the night before, and after he had made his examination he ventured to suggest that Miss Seymour must have been dreaming.

"No," Anice said; "I was not dreaming, for I had not even closed my eyes since I went to bed. There must be some other explanation of it somewhere."

But if there was neither she nor the butler could find it.

#### CHAPTER IV.

ANICE was glad when the morning came, for never had night seemed so long—perhaps, because never before had she spent such a sleepless vigil.

She was up betimes—before even the servants were down—and determined to refresh her flagging energies by taking a long walk before breakfast. Accordingly, she let herself out of a little side door, and was soon in the lane where she and Gilbert Dering had first met.

It was not a very pleasant morning; there was no sun, and the clouds still hung low as they had done the night before. Although the storm had not yet broken, it was clear that it must break ere very long.

At a turning in the lane Anice came face to face with no less a person than Gilbert Dering himself.

"This is a surprise, Miss Seymour!" he said, raising his cap, and coming forward after a momentary start of astonishment—and, as it seemed to Anice, not altogether pleased astonishment. "Where are you going at this time of the morning, if I may be permitted to inquire?"

"I'm not going a-milking, which would seem to be the only excuse for getting up so early," she returned, rather archly, "and I am not bent on any special errand. I am only come out for a walk, and to get an appetite for breakfast."

"A most laudable reason, I am sure, and a most fortunate resolve on your part, so far as I am concerned," he said, gallantly. Then his tone changed—grew more serious. "I

cannot tell you how glad I am to meet you alone. There is something I want to say to you."

"Don't say it!" she exclaimed, flippantly, and yet with a sort of desperate desire to avert what she felt sure was coming. "I am not at all desirous of hearing anything that is in the least degree grave."

"How do you know it is grave?"

"From your face. You have a tell-tale expression, Mr. Dering."

"I had a bad night," he observed apologetically, as he saw her eyes rest upon him for a moment. "I could not sleep, and sleeplessness always tells on me."

"It tells on most people," she returned.

"I can sympathise with you, for I, too, had a restless night."

"Indeed!" rather eagerly. "How was that?"

For answer she gave him a brief sketch of the events that had taken place in the oak chamber, he listening very attentively the while.

"It is curious," he observed, as she finished. Then he paused. "I suppose," he said presently, in a tentative way, and laughing rather deprecatingly, "I suppose you do not believe in the supernatural?"

"Of course not!" very decidedly. Anice was much more certain on this point in the daylight that she had been the night before in the dark! "I don't fancy any person of sense can believe in it."

"Well, then, I can't rank myself in your category, I'm afraid. For my part I'm inclined to think with Horatio that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. Besides, there are special reasons why one might imagine the oak chamber haunted."

He looked at her closely as he said this, and he saw a flush of consciousness rise to her face.

"You have heard of my uncle's death?" he added, quickly.

She gravely nodded her head.

"It was a sad—a terrible affair," he went on, in a subdued voice. "Poor old man! In the course of nature he could not have lived long; but my unfortunate brother—"

He came to a sudden stop, and looked on the ground without completing his sentence.

"Have you heard or seen anything of him since?" Anice asked, hesitatingly.

"No. He is somewhere abroad, and no doubt he will stay there all his life. He would not dare to venture back into England. And yet the English law is such that he retains, nominally at least, all his property. If I had half his wealth it would help me very much in what I am going to say to you. I am a poor man, and as such have no right to address you, Anice; but love will not be restrained by such arguments as these, and I love you so well that my love must be its own excuse. Will you be my wife?"

While speaking he had taken her hand, and in spite of her endeavours to release it still held it in his. He looked very handsome, with his bright blue eyes, full of pleading earnestness, and his yellow hair gleaming bright in close-out curls on his bare head.

For a moment Anice wavered. He had been her ideal so long, she had woven so many sweet and tender memories round that first meeting of theirs in the grim dusk of the London fog that her heart pleaded strongly in his favour. But at the same time she was conscious of that strange repulsion that had made itself felt several times during their intercourse, and under its influence she drew back.

"Oh, Mr. Dering! I wish you had not said this to me!"

"But why?"

"Because—well, for one thing, we have been acquainted such a short time—"

"We shall have all the rest of our lives to remedy that defect," he interposed, eagerly.

"Yes, I know, but what I was going to say was that after such a short friendship as ours it is impossible that you can—"

"Love you?" he cried, as she paused. "Oh, Anice, you never in all your life made a greater mistake. Love does not grow like an oak, or an aloe—it shoots up like Jonah's gourd, in one night. It is but a poor, cold imitation of passion that takes weeks and months to develop. Love—the only love that is worth having, springs up spontaneously. I loved you the first moment I saw you."

Across Anice's mind there flashed the memory of the confession that she, at first sight, had fallen in love with the man who had rescued her from the London ruffians. In the face of this memory how could she declare her disbelief in the sincerity of Dering's affection?

Emboldened by her silence, he drew nearer to her, and would have thrown his arm round her waist, if she had not prevented him.

She began some sort of a negative answer, when he stopped her by a wild flow of eloquence that almost carried her with it.

It was impossible to doubt that he loved her ardently, desperately, and what woman is unmoved by the eloquent passion of a handsome man?

Nevertheless, she was, in a measure, true to herself.

"I cannot consent to marry you," she said at length, when he paused. "If I were to do so I should wrong you as well as myself, for I feel I do not care for you as a wife should care for a husband."

"I will teach you to care for me, Anice. Perhaps I have been too impetuous. I have spoken too soon. For Heaven's sake do not condemn me to despair by refusing me—give me leave to speak to you again in a month from now!"

And to this she consented, although, at the same time, she could not help thinking there was a species of weakness in thus yielding to his importunities.

"Please leave me," she said at last, with some agitation, as he bent down, and covered her hand with kisses. "I am tired, and should like to be alone."

He was much too diplomatic not to accede to this request, and with a low bow he turned round and walked away in an opposite direction, while Anice increased her pace—perhaps with the idea of also increasing the distance between them.

She was worried and dissatisfied with herself. She felt sure that in the intervening month Dering's influence over her would strengthen, and she would give an affirmative answer to his suit.

"How foolish I am!" she murmured to herself; but the reflection did not bring any special comfort with it.

If she had not been so disturbed in mind she would have noticed how heavily the clouds had gathered over her head, and how dark it was growing; but it was not until a few heavy drops fell that she awoke to the fact that she was some two miles away from home, and that a storm was imminent.

She looked round in search of shelter, and the only one that met her eyes was a half-ruined mill, picturesquely overgrown with ivy, on the bank of a stream that years ago had helped to turn it.

Gathering up her skirts, she made for this mill, and found that the inside was not nearly so dilapidated as the exterior promised—at any rate, it was water-tight, and that was a consideration under the circumstances.

The storm gave no promise of cessation, and Anice grew tired of watching the heavy drops come pattering down on the ivy. She looked round, and determined to explore the mill, beginning her voyage of discovery by mounting a sort of ladder that led to the upper part. Having got to the top she was confronted by a door, which she pushed open, and then remained standing on the threshold, very much surprised at the sight that met her eyes.

This was nothing less than a man lying full length on some sacks, his head pillowed by his arm, and fast asleep.

Perhaps in itself the fact of a man having sought a night's shelter in the mill was not so very astonishing, and if he had been a common labourer or a tired tramp Anice would have had no grounds for surprise. The strange part of it was that the man was a gentleman!

Yes, in spite of shabby clothes, in spite of a long, dark, unkempt-looking beard and moustache, and a dilapidated felt-hat pulled low over his brows, the fact remained. He was a gentleman!

Just as the girl was about to withdraw, the sleeper awoke and sprang to his feet with an expression of alert alarm that struck Anice as rather curious.

"I beg your pardon!" she faltered, overcome with confusion. "I had no idea anyone was in here or I would not have intruded. I came into the mill to take shelter from the storm."

The man raised his battered old hat with a courteous bow.

"Pray do not apologise. I am afraid I alarmed you far more than you alarmed me. I have overleapt myself. It is broad daylight I see; but it was late, or rather early, when I lay down, and I was very tired."

He said this with an apologetic air, and as Anice hastily retreated downstairs he followed, bringing down with him an empty box and a couple of sacks. With these primitive appliances he made a seat, which he offered to the young girl.

"I am afraid it will be some time before the storm clears," he said, after going to the casement and looking out, "and you will be tired if you stand all the while."

She took the seat with a few words of thanks. Strangely enough, she felt no sense of alarm at being in this lonely place with a perfect stranger, although such a sentiment would have been quite excusable under the circumstances. His manner, which was quiet and deferential, reassured her, and gave her complete confidence.

"I hope," he said, presently, "that you are not far from home?"

"About two miles."

"So much as that! Would you like me to go there and tell them to send a carriage for you?"

"Oh, no, thank you! It is not worth while. As soon as the rain ceases a little I will run back. If I do get wet I shan't hurt."

"You will run the risk of catching cold."

"I suppose I shall; but I don't mind that," she answered, with a bright smile, and shaking out her dress, which up to now had been drawn well up above her ankles. The movement caused a rose, which had been fastened in her belt, to fall to the floor, and before she had time to pick it up her companion had done so.

He held it in his hand a moment, looking at it before he offered it to her.

"It is years since I saw one of these old-fashioned roses," he said, a little dreamily. "A bush used to grow on the wall of my old home, and the roses were exactly the same as this."

"Please keep it if you would like to do so," said Anice, gently. "It is a pretty rose—one of my favourites, and it has a sweet smell."

"It is more than good of you to give it me," he returned, after a momentary hesitation, "and I have not the courage to refuse it. I have heard it said that nothing is so powerful in bringing back a memory as a flower's perfume, but I never believed it until this minute."

There was something intensely sad in his voice—so sad, indeed, that Anice found herself growing sympathetic.

"Have you been abroad, then?" she asked.

"Yes, for some years. What made you think I had?"

"Your voice when you spoke of home."

He smiled rather sadly.

"Your perceptions are quick," he observed; but he did not pursue the subject—indeed, he seemed more inclined to ask for information

than to give it, and in a little while Anice found herself talking to him of the Ivy House, its loneliness, and the evil reputation it had obtained through being untenanted so long.

Then the storm ceased almost as suddenly as it commenced, and she said good-bye. Some impulse made her hold out her hand, and he, looking somewhat surprised, took it and held it for a moment in his.

He seemed slightly embarrassed, and a dark flush rose to his cheeks under their tan.

"I am going to make a request that I am afraid you will think very strange," he said, in a low voice. "Of course you are at liberty to refuse it if you think best. It is that you will not mention to any one that you have seen me here. I have a reason for asking it, but I cannot tell you what it is."

"There is no necessity why you should," she returned, with a touch of dignity. "Of course I shan't mention it if you wish me not to do so."

He thanked her, and she left the mill. If she had turned round she would have seen him standing in the ruined doorway gazing after her; and when her light figure had vanished out of sight he raised the rose she had given him to his lips, and kissed it passionately. Then he sighed deeply, and retreated into the building again.

## CHAPTER V.

ANICE had much food for thought during the next few days, and much to tell her father when he came home.

Mr. Seymour confessed himself puzzled by her narration; but the part of it that struck him most was Gilbert Dering's proposal, and on this he was inclined to look favourably.

For his own part he had taken a great fancy to this new neighbour, and urged his suit with characteristic force.

"It seems to me you can't do better than marry the young man," he observed. "You are two-and-twenty, and it's high time you were settled in life. What's to become of you when I am dead if you have no husband to look after you? Besides, I would much rather you married a plain English gentleman like Dering than some rich lord who would have carried you off from me altogether. With Dering for your husband there would be no necessity for you to live away from me. We could all live together, you see!"

These, and many other similar arguments he advanced, and if Anice made any objections—as she invariably did—he pooh-poohed them, and told her she was a girl who did not know her own mind; and as for not loving Dering, why, she would love him well enough when she was married to him!

Thus encouraged by Mr. Seymour, Gilbert lost no opportunity of trying to overcome the young girl's resistance. He was at the Ivy House every day, and assumed over Anice a quiet air of possession that showed he already regarded himself as her affianced lover.

And, indeed, she felt that ere long he would be openly recognised as such, for it seemed to her impossible to hold out against the persistence of his wooing, however much her own inclinations might be against it.

The force of his strong will was compelling hers as a magnet draws a needle, and her life became a constant struggle against the position into which she was being forced.

In order to avoid him she was out of the house as much as possible, but her walks had lost their old zest; she was too listless and dispirited to take any pleasure in them.

One morning, when she was sitting on the rocks down by the sea, a gust of wind blew her hat off, and carried it to the sands below. She hurried down to get it before the tide had time to sweep it away, when she found herself forestalled. The stranger of the old mill had picked it up, and brought it to her with a low bow.

A bright colour flashed into her cheeks. She would not have confessed it to herself, perhaps, but it was none the less a fact that she

was greatly interested in this sad-faced man, who seemed such an enigma.

"Where did you spring from?" she asked, as she took the hat, and set it on her lovely dusky plaits of hair. "I have been on the rocks for some time, and I have not seen anyone approach either from right or left."

"I have been exploring the caves," he answered, with some embarrassment. "Probably I was here before you came."

There was a slight pause. Anice was leaning against a slab of rock; her companion stood at some little distance, conscious of the graceful picture she made in her pink cambric dress, with its dainty knots of ribbons, knowing, too, that there was danger for him in looking at it too long.

Prudence warned him that he had better depart; incantation bade him remain.

"I did not know you were staying in the neighbourhood?" said Anice, at last, breaking a silence that threatened to become awkward.

"Yes—I am still at the mill."

Her looks expressed her surprise, and he added, with a faint smile,—

"It is not a very delectable residence, you think. That is true, but it suits my purpose."

"Surely you must find it very dull!" she exclaimed.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I am so used to what you call 'dullness' that I have long ceased to notice it. I feel sometimes like a hermit crab, dwelling all alone in my shell, caring for nobody, and nobody caring for me, or, as Byron puts it,—

"The world forgetting, by the world forgot."

"That sounds very sad," observed Anice, trying to speak lightly; "but when it is the case, I think the world is often blamed for the fault of the individual."

He sighed.

"No doubt you are right in nine cases out of ten, Miss Seymour; but mine is the tenth case, and therefore I claim your sympathy."

"Indeed, you have it!" she exclaimed, impulsively, drawing a step nearer, and holding out her hand, with her frank, sweet smile.

She could not understand the charm this man had for her, or the interest he awoke in her breast, but both were as overpowering as they were new, and she made no effort to fight against either.

He took her hand eagerly, and held it in his.

"If you knew how sweet it is for me to find someone who looks upon me kindly!" he cried, giving way to a sudden burst of freedom as impetuous as her own. "I have no right to ask for your friendship—I, who am poor, unknown to you—a very outcast! And yet there are some natures that do not regard these things, and yours is one, therefore I am emboldened. May I speak to you sometimes when I meet you?"

"But you never do meet me!"

He smiled.

"More often than you think. Hardly a day has passed since we met at the Mill House but I have contrived to catch a glimpse of you, though myself unseen."

"Then you intend staying on at the Mill?"

"Yes, until—"

"Until—what?"

"Until my purpose is achieved," he answered, his eyes growing dark, and his lips compressing themselves together in a firm line. But he did not say what that purpose was, and she had too much tact to ask him.

After that, in some mysterious manner, it chanced that they saw each other nearly every day. Sometimes it was but for a few minutes, sometimes it was for over an hour, and each meeting drew tighter the bond that held them together.

They were together on the beach the evening before the day when Anice was to give Gilbert Dering his answer, and, as was very natural, the girl was rather depressed.

Her companion—whom she knew as Mr. Blake—asked her the cause of her low spirits,

but for very obvious reasons she did not reply to his question; and just as they were about parting, and her hand lay in his, a shadow fell across the evening sunshine, and looking up simultaneously they beheld Dering himself.

Blake started violently, and dropped Anice's hand as if it had been a live coal—indeed, he was more ill at ease than Anice herself.

For a few seconds no one spoke. Dering stood perfectly still, looking from one to the other, an evil expression in his handsome eyes. Presently he broke the silence.

"I suppose I ought to apologise for thus interrupting your interview," he said, in a voice of suppressed fury. "Miss Seymour, may I request an introduction to your—friend?"

"Excuse me," said Blake, drawing back. "I must decline the introduction," and he turned round as if he would have left them.

At the sound of his voice Dering started violently, looked at him very keenly, and then laid a heavy hand on his shoulder, thus preventing his departure.

"Wait a minute, if you please," he said, a tone of malignant triumph thrilling his voice.

"Perhaps, instead of Miss Seymour introducing you to me I may introduce you to her!" and after the introduction she will probably not be quite so anxious to keep up your acquaintance!"

He turned to Anice, his eyes gleaming.

"Miss Seymour, do you know that the gentleman to whom you have been talking is masquerading here under a disguise? that he is in effect—"

But here Anice interrupted him with a quick, proud movement of her hands.

"Who he is I do not wish to hear, except from his own lips, Mr. Dering! What he is I know without being told!"

Blake's eyes dwelt on hers for a moment with a light of divine love and gratitude in their depths, then they fell despondently enough.

As for Dering, he grew still paler than he had been before Anice's words and tone spoke for themselves, and showed him what she herself, as yet, only dimly suspected—that she loved this man. The knowledge goaded him to fury.

"But you shall hear!" he exclaimed, violently. "It is my duty to tell you—to save you from yourself and the consequences of your own folly. This man is a felon—an escaped prisoner—in effect, he is my half-brother, Lionel Dering, and—a murderer!"

A low cry broke from Anice's white lips, and she put up her hands to her ears as if she would shut out the dreadful words. Then she looked at Blake.

"Is this true?" she asked, below her breath.

"It is true, inasmuch as I am Lionel Dering," replied the young man, in a proud, firm tone; "but that I am a murderer—no words that were ever spoken are false! I am accused of being the author of my uncle's death, and I am ready to acknowledge that the evidence is strongly against me, but I am innocent of the crime—that I swear!"

"It is easy enough to swear," retorted Gilbert, sneeringly. "I am, afraid, however, your oaths will carry very little weight with them at the bar of your country!"

Lionel took no notice of the taunt. He turned eagerly to Anice.

"Do you believe me, Miss Seymour?" he asked, in a low, strained tone.

She raised her eyes, and they met his. He returned her gaze firmly and steadfastly, though with a wistful suspense that touched her keenly. Surely no guilty man ever looked like that!

As we know, Anice did not wait to argue out a conclusion when instinct guided her to it, and in this instance she was quite oblivious of the many reasons there were why Gilbert Dering should be a much better judge than herself of his brother's guilt. She only felt that Lionel was innocent, and bravely and fearlessly she told him so.

"Thank Heaven for your faith!" he exclaimed, fervently. "Even yet, if only because you trust me, my innocence shall be proved before all the world!"

"Then you intend to stay and take your trial this time?" said Gilbert, with a bitter sneer.

"Yes. It was cowardly to run away before, but the evidence was so dead against me that the end seemed inevitable, and I had not the courage to stay and face it."

"The evidence is equally dead against you now," observed his brother. "Heaven knows I have no business to advise you, for if I did my duty I should deliver you over to the next coastguard that passes. But after all, and infamously as you have behaved, I can't forget that the same blood runs in both our veins, and I give you the chance of escaping. Go away—leave the country at once, and let no one know your destination! Miss Seymour and I will keep the secret of your ever having been in England since the murder."

As he spoke Anice's quick eyes had caught sight of a distant figure advancing in the direction of where she was standing. It was one of the coastguards, and he would have to pass within a couple of yards of the trio. She turned to Lionel imploringly.

"Yes, yes!" she exclaimed, "your brother has given you good advice, and you cannot do better than follow it. Go, before it is too late!"

Lionel lifted his eyes and looked at her for a moment in silence, then he shook his head.

"The advice is too hard to follow. I came to England for two reasons, and the one rested on the other. I was haunted by a woman's face that I longed to see again, and I knew I had no right to look upon it until I could stand forth as a free man before all the world, so I resolved to risk the fear of detection and see if I could not gain fresh facts that might weigh in my favour, and then I might dare to seek out the woman whom to look on was to love. That woman, Miss Seymour, was yourself!"

"Myself!" repeated Anice, in unforgotten surprise.

"Yes. And surely it was the hand of Fate that decreed you should be the first I spoke to after my arrival in England!"

"But," said the young girl, bewilderedly, "you had never seen me till we met in the old mill!"

"You are mistaken," he returned, composedly. "The first time I saw you was in Eaton-square three years ago, when I rescued you from some ruffians who had assaulted you in a fog. As we neared a lamp you raised your veil for a moment, and I saw your face. Don't you remember? Ah, I forgot my disguise," and as he spoke he threw down the thick, shaggy beard that had done so much to hide his features, and stood forth in the full light of day, as Nature intended he should—blue-eyed, fair-haired, and with a skin bronzed by the suns of tropic lands.

The resemblance between the half-brothers was striking—the same eyes, hair, features and figure, only the expression differed. In Gilbert it was furtive and watchful, in Lionel open and fearless.

Anice gave a quick little cry, and came a step nearer, while he caught her hands in his. Prudence was forgotten, danger was ignored. In this sudden moment of recognition heart spoke to heart, and there was no need for the lips to translate what they said.

Gilbert ground his heel on the rock with a muttered curse. As much as he could love anyone he loved Anice, and it was as the very bitterness of death to see her thus tacitly confessing her affection for his hated brother, especially at the moment when she discovered the deception he himself had practised upon her, in leading her to believe that it was he who had been her rescuer three years ago. He made a signal to the coastguard, and advanced a few steps to meet him.

"That man is an escaped felon!" he said, in a voice that trembled with a complexity of

emotions, "and I call upon you to aid me in effecting his capture."

The constable stood still, looking from one to the other in amazement. His indecision was put an end to by Lionel, who advanced quietly towards them.

"I shall give you no trouble," he said, calmly. "I see that it would be impossible to escape even if I desired to do so, therefore I yield myself as your prisoner."

## CHAPTER VI.

GAMER was the excitement in the county when it became known that Lionel Dering—the man who had been arrested on suspicion of murdering his uncle three years ago, but who had contrived to escape—was again lodged in W—gaol.

There was no danger of his being permitted to escape this time. The strictest possible guard was kept upon him, and no one save his solicitor was allowed access to him. Even Anise, although she had applied for it, was not given leave to see him.

Of the part Gilbert had played in his brother's capture no one suspected anything. Perhaps he was not proud of it; and, besides, if people had known it they would certainly have said that his conduct was dictated by self-interest. So long as Lionel lived, or as there was no proof of his death, Gilbert was unable to touch the property left by the old Squire; and during these last three years the estate had remained in the hands of the executors, while the revenues accumulated without anyone getting the benefit of them. But in case of the elder brother's death, the younger would inherit everything.

Anise was the sole friend the prisoner possessed. During the three years that had elapsed since he left his native country all his old companions had become scattered, or had grown to believe him guilty, and the result was that no one took a purely personal interest in his trial save the girl who had grown to love him so well.

But she was a host in herself, and worked away with a steadfast conviction in the innocence of the accused man that almost convinced her father too. Mr. Seymour declined mixing himself up in the affair, but he gave his daughter *carte blanche* as regards money, and did not withhold his sympathy either.

"If you really think he did not commit the crime, then, for Heaven's sake, do your best to get him off!" he said; and in giving her a blank cheque he also gave her the name of a solicitor in London, named Cranburn, who was used to criminal cases, and who had established a reputation for his ability in conducting them.

To this gentleman Anise sent, and he responded to her letter in person. The two had a long interview at the Ivy House, during which the girl gave him all the particulars she knew, and also her own experiences with regard to the oak chamber.

He listened attentively, and made sundry notes in his pocket-book. He was a short, white-haired man, with deep-set eyes, and firm, clear-cut lips—a man who involuntarily inspired one with confidence, though, in this instance, he himself seemed doubtful enough.

"I would rather not give you my opinion on the case at this juncture," he said, when the interview was over. "I must see Mr. Lionel Dering, and then I shall be in a better position to judge."

Accordingly, he obtained permission to see the prisoner; but before doing so he got a file of old newspapers which gave a full account of the old Squire's murder, and made himself thoroughly conversant with every particular. Nevertheless, he heard Lionel's story through to the end, glancing up every now and then to look searchingly into the narrator's face.

"Well?" said Lionel, interrogatively, as he finished speaking.

"Well," Mr. Cranburn returned, slowly, "the circumstantial evidence is strongly against

you—there is no denying that. You see, we have the fact that you were supposed to be your uncle's heir, that you were in debt, and that the Squire absolutely refused to give you the money required to pay these debts of yours. On the very afternoon of the murder witnesses testify that you and he had quarrelled, and that you were overheard to declare that if you could not get the money by fair means you would try foul."

"I acknowledge it," interrupted Lionel, crimsoning; "but the words meant nothing; they were merely the reckless utterances of a young man frantic with passion."

"That may be," returned the lawyer; "but viewed by the light of subsequent events they grow significant. Then there is the fact that the Squire slept in the oak chamber, and was found in the morning dead from the effects of chloroform. You were known to have chloroform in your possession, and at the inquiry before the magistrate a local chemist proved supplying you with some two days previous to the murder."

"That, also, I admit. I was then making a collection of moths, and I required the chloroform for the purpose of stupefying the insects. By some means or other I lost the bottle on the morning of my uncle's death—how or where I am unable to state."

"That is a pity," observed the lawyer, "as it would be a most important discovery if we could trace that bottle. However, there is another point in the case which tells still more against you, and it is this. Your uncle slept in the oak chamber, not as a rule, but because on that especial night his own room was flooded by the rain. When his dead body was discovered the door leading to the corridor was fastened on the inside, as was also the window. There was another door leading to your own sleeping apartment, and of that door you had the key."

Lionel's head sank on his breast. "Yes," he said, despondently, "I am quite aware how terribly damning that is, and moreover, it is a fact I cannot explain, for I always carried the key of the door about with me. It was a small one, and I had placed it on my bunch of keys."

The lawyer was thoughtful for a few minutes. Presently he said,—

"Is it possible that any one had a duplicate?"

"No, for the lock was a new one, and ever since it had been put on the key was never out of my possession for a minute. If any one had taken it I should have missed it directly."

"What about the window of your room, and the other door opening on the corridor?"

"They were both fastened on the inside. I never went to bed without taking this precaution. The case is a mystery from beginning to end."

"Are you a heavy sleeper?"

"Neither a particularly heavy one nor a specially light one; but I have this peculiarity, if, while I am asleep, any one by chance enters the room I invariably awake."

"Then you think that on the night of the murder no one passed through your apartment?"

"That is my impression."

The lawyer remained silent for a while. The case was indeed a mystery. Here was a man found murdered—for the position of the body, and the evidences of a struggle precluded all ideas of suicide—the doors and windows were fastened securely, and the man who slept in the adjoining room declared he had heard no sound.

This latter fact, however, might be partially accounted for by the thickness of the walls, which were old and solid; but how to account for the presence of the murderer in the room itself, supposing that murderer to be other than Lionel Dering?

No wonder that three years ago the young man, seeing the evidence so strongly against him, had been hopeless regarding his ultimate acquittal, and had escaped from prison when the chance of doing so offered itself!

"I wonder," observed Mr. Cranburn, carrying out his own train of thought, "I wonder that, under the circumstances, you risked returning to England?"

The young man's face flushed a deep red.

"I will be open with you," he said. "My motive was twofold. On the very day I left England I saw the woman who was my fate—in a word, I fell in love at first sight, and the memory of my love never left me during all the long days of my exile. I longed to return and prove my innocence; and, brooding over the case, I came to the conclusion that there must be a secret entrance to the oak chamber, through which the murderer had escaped. This entrance I fancied must lead down to the cliffs, on which the house is built, and I resolved to thoroughly examine the cave with a view to discovering if my idea was correct. It was for this purpose that I disguised myself, and took up my abode at the old mill, where I thought there was no chance of my being seen; but though I was constantly down on the cliffs, and though I made the minutest search, I found nothing to support my theory."

"Nevertheless," observed the lawyer, with decision, "it seems to me there must be something in your idea after all. I will have another examination made, both of the oak chamber itself, and the caves down below."

Lionel sighed rather despondently. It was evident that he did not place much confidence in the result of the search.

"If you will permit me to say so," added Mr. Cranburn, shrugging his shoulders, "I think you would have been much wiser to keep out of England."

"No!" exclaimed the young man, energetically, "I do not agree with you. What was my life worth out in America, without friends, without money, without home, and with the fear of apprehension ever hanging over me? The worst certainty is less miserable than suspense."

Soon afterwards the lawyer took leave. Versed in human nature as he was, he yet believed Lionel to be innocent, in spite of the circumstantial evidence against him. If he were guilty, he argued, he would never have returned to England, no matter how strong the motive might be that brought him thither.

He reported the result of his interview to Anise—a very unusual frankness, for he was not given to making confidences. Somehow, he had great faith both in the young girl's discretion and her keenness of perception. He knew, too, that woman's wit often succeeded where man's strength failed!

His confidence was not misplaced. Anise at once seized on the idea that there must be a secret entrance to the oak chamber, and suggested that an architect should be called in, whose special knowledge would enable him to declare with certainty whether this was the case.

Accordingly this was done, and the next morning the architect came, bringing with him various implements by which he might measure and test the solidity of the walls.

Anise and Mr. Cranburn were present during the examination, and watched it with the most anxious care.

The oak chamber was a medium-sized room at one corner of the house, just under the shadow of a heavy buttress, and having one large window set in very solid masonry.

As the reader already knows, it had two doors—one leading into another bedroom, and the second into the passage outside.

Both the architect and Mr. Cranburn made the most accurate measurements, and they both arrived at the same conclusion, namely, that the walls were perfectly solid, and that it was utterly impossible that there could be a trap-door either in them, the floor, or the ceiling.

After leaving the oak chamber the trio went outside into the passage, as Mr. Cranburn, not satisfied with his investigation of this one room, wished to examine all the adjoining apartments.

As they were standing looking round Anice's attention was attracted by a door that she never remembered noticing before—a small, unpretentious-looking door, set far back in the wall, and hidden from view by a green-baize curtain. This they found to be locked, and the housekeeper, Mrs. Pole, was sent for to bring the key.

That worthy person arrived on the scene in a state of evident perturbation, and declared herself much surprised at being called upon to produce a key which she said had been lost months ago. She was very red in the face when she made this announcement, and cast a venomous glance on Anice, as if she blamed her for making such an unreasonable request.

"Lost months ago, was it?" queried Mr. Cranburn, looking at the housekeeper very steadily. "How many months ago, may I ask?"

"Twelve months."

"Just one year?"

"Yes—just exactly."

"How do you fix the date?"

Mrs. Pole glared at him savagely.

"I suppose I have got a memory, haven't I?" she snarled.

"Evidently—and a very good one," rejoined the lawyer, suavely. "I should like to know, however, if there is any circumstance that occurred at the time by which you recollect losing the key?"

"No, there isn't."

"In what way did you lose it?"

"That I can't tell. I never had no occasion to go to them upstairs rooms, and they've been kept locked ever since I've bin here."

Saying which she flounced off, without deigning another word or glance. Anice meanwhile had been, in an eminently feminine way, peering through the keyhole of the door in question, and now came back, holding in her hand a tiny fragment of cloth of a curious check pattern.

"Look!" she said, "what I have found caught in the door!"

It was examined in silence by Mr. Cranburn, who presently said, in a tone of conviction,—

"The housekeeper's story is false. That door has been opened less than twelve months ago, for from the appearance of this bit of cloth I should say it had not been there more than two or three weeks at most. If we only knew the coat from out of which it has been torn!"

Anice looked at it again, and as she did so she became certain that she had seen the pattern before. But when, and under what circumstances? Suddenly remembrance came to her, and she recollected that a coat similar to this had been worn by the man who had started forth to accost Mr. Gilbert Dering on the morning when she first met him—the same man whom she had found in conversation with the housekeeper the night she had been so frightened by the apparition of the Squire at the window of the oak chamber.

"And you say you had an idea that this man was known to Mr. Gilbert Dering?" asked the lawyer, after she had communicated her discovery to him.

"That was my impression; but I also fancied that Mr. Dering wished to keep secret the fact of their acquaintance. I cannot tell you how I became possessed of this idea, but I had it."

Soon afterwards, seeing that his business was ended, the architect went away. Mr. Cranburn sighed as he watched him depart.

"I confess I am disappointed at the result of the search," he observed. "I had hoped great things from this man's visit, but I am now convinced beyond possibility of a doubt that there is no secret entrance to the oak chamber. Whatever the solution of the mystery may be, it is not that."

Anice was disappointed too—nay, more, she was sick at heart, for the days were going by all too swiftly, and nothing had turned up in Lionel's favour. Each day only served to

strengthen the love that had grown up so strangely in her heart towards the suspected man—the love that had now become part of her very being.

"Oh, he must be saved—he must be!" she cried out in a sudden agony of apprehension, clasping her hands together, and speaking aloud in semi-unconsciousness of the lawyer's presence.

"At all events," said Mr. Cranburn, kindly, "it shall not be for want of endeavour on my part. I have been thinking that we must have the lock of that door picked without delay. I am anxious to see what those upstairs rooms are, and where they lead to."

Anice at once despatched a servant for a locksmith, but as there was not one nearer than W—, a distance of four miles, some hour or two must elapse before he could arrive. Mr. Cranburn spent the interval in walking first to Mr. Gilbert Dering's house—the outside of which he investigated with much curiosity—and then in the village inn, where he spent an hour in the billiard-room, gossiping very affably with certain village worthies, who were only too glad to be gossip with.

On his return he found to his disgust that the groom had come back with the news that the locksmith was too busy to leave home until the next morning, which meant that a day would be lost.

"I must have a detective down here," he said to Anice. "There is more to look after than I can do myself. I will send for one to come down to-morrow."

He accordingly wrote his letter, which, for reasons that will be guessed, he resolved to put in the post himself; but instead of leaving the house by the front door he let himself out the back way, and was just in time to see the housekeeper give a letter to the groom—the same man who had gone into W— for the locksmith.

Both Mrs. Pole and the servant were standing with their backs to the lawyer, and consequently did not see him as he slipped quietly out, but he noticed that the housekeeper was talking in a low, impressive tone, as if she were laying some important injunction on her companion.

Mr. Cranburn was in no hurry to reach the post-office. He loitered quietly along, and was presently overtaken by the groom.

"Got a light anywhere about you?" he said, in the easy tone of goodfellowship he knew so well how to assume, while he bit off the end of a cigar. "I find I have left my matches behind me."

The man produced a box of lucifers, and it was easy enough for Mr. Cranburn to get into conversation with him, for he was but a raw youth, and evidently felt himself highly flattered by the lawyer's condescension. Presently, however, as he heard the stable clock at the Ivy House striking five, he declared he must hurry on, for the post-office closed at a few minutes past five.

"You'll be too late, my friend, without putting on an extra stamp!" observed Mr. Cranburn. "Here, give me your letter, and I'll stamp it for you, then you needn't hurry for another ten minutes."

The boy handed him the epistle, which up to the present had been wrapped in brown paper. The lawyer's quick eye read the address while he affixed the extra stamp. It was written in a scrawling, uneducated hand, and ran thus:

"Mr. James Smith,  
"Locksmith,"  
"W—"

"You have another letter there," he said, as he gave the first one back. "Shall I put a stamp on that too?"

"No, sir, thank you. It ain't going by post, this one ain't."

But he did not say what its destination was, and this was a point on which Mr. Cranburn desired to satisfy himself, so after he had put his own letter in the post-box, and

the groom had done the same, he stood loitering until the latter had proceeded a hundred yards or so, then he called a sharp-looking little urchin who was playing about near, and gave him a sixpence.

"I want you to follow that servant in livery, and when you have found out where he goes to, come back and tell me, and I'll give you another sixpence. He's not to see you, mind. Do you understand?"

The little fellow nodded intelligently, and set off. Mr. Cranburn had not long to wait ere he returned to claim his sixpence.

"He's left a letter at Mr. Gilbert Dering's," was the result of his mission, and the lawyer was so well satisfied, that instead of sixpence he gave his messenger a shilling.

"I think I begin to see now a little clearer," he said to himself, as he retraced his steps, "I shall have something to tell Miss Anice when I get back."

## CHAPTER VII.

"It is strange," observed Mr. Cranburn, didactically, as he sat opposite Anice, in her sitting-room half an hour later, "it is strange what an immense fabric of evidence one may build up, if one has the merest scrap of a brick on which to lay the foundation. Now, that bit of plaid material that you found caught in the hinge of the door gave me the brick I required, and on it I have built up my edifice. Once you had identified it as being the same stuff as the coat worn by the man whom the housekeeper called her nephew, it was clear that the man must have been in the house quite lately, and by the same token Mrs. Pole must have told a lie about the loss of the key."

"Now people, as a rule, don't tell lies just for the mere pleasure of telling them. They usually have a motive, and the motive in this case may have a bearing on my client's interests."

"I made inquiries in the village concerning this man in the plaid coat, and I found that he was known as the owner of a fishing boat which occasionally came over here, that he had several times been seen in company with Mr. Gilbert Dering, and that he was generally regarded as a suspicious character, though no one had anything definite to bring against him. I find he has been hanging about the place for four years or thereabouts, and that he is well acquainted with Mrs. Pole."

"As I told you this morning, I did not like that woman's manner, and, more than that, I saw that she was alarmed by my questions, and was well on her guard against betraying herself."

"Now, I argued there must be some cause for this alarm, and it had to do with the locked door. When I saw her this afternoon give a letter to the groom, it struck me that if I discovered to whom the letter was written it might help me, so I managed to catch sight of the envelope, and found it addressed to—whom do you think? Why, the locksmith at W—."

"I saw immediately what this meant. The groom is in that woman's pay, and, acting under her instructions, he never went to the locksmith this morning, because she did not wish the door to be opened to-day."

"But she knew that to-morrow it would be impossible to put off the picking of the lock, and so, in all probability, her epistle to the locksmith was to tell him to come in the morning, and not to mention that he had not been applied to to-day. No doubt she had some fine story to tell him to account for this request. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly," said Anice; "only all this is more or less surmise."

The lawyer smiled.

"I think you will find it is surmise that will be justified by facts, Miss Seymour. Anyhow, in fault of a better theory, we will act on this one. There was still another letter written by Mrs. Pole, and that was to Mr. Gilbert Dering."

Anice started, and grew whiter.

"Surely," she said, "you don't imagine—" and then she stopped.

"Collision between the two?" said the lawyer, quietly, filling up the pause. "Yes, that is exactly what I do imagine. There is some secret connected with those upstairs rooms, and these three people are in it. Tomorrow they know the rooms will be entered, so whatever they have to do must be done to-night. My purpose is to sit up and watch that door; but none of the household, least of all Mrs. Pole, must know of my intention. Let us now go upstairs, and see if we can find a good hiding place where I can keep my vigil."

This was a matter of no difficulty, for in the passage, just opposite the door of the oak chamber, and commanding a view of the little door beyond, was a large suit of armour, vizor and all, and inside this Mr. Cranburn decided to ensconce himself.

Anice wished to keep watch also, but the lawyer advised her not to leave her room, and promised to communicate with her without delay in case he discovered anything.

Naturally enough, as night drew near, the young girl grew very excited. Somehow, she placed implicit faith in the lawyer's theory, and shared his opinion that if there really was some compact between Mrs. Pole and Gilbert Dering it had to do with the murder of the Squire, and in order to avoid discovery they would take some sort of action to-night.

But the household retired as usual, Anice to the apartment she had slept in since vacating the oak chamber, Mr. Cranburn to the room allotted to him.

It was not until the clock had struck twelve, and a profound silence had settled on the house, that the latter crept quietly into the corridor and took his place in the armour—first of all, however, going into the oak chamber and the adjoining room in order to see that the windows and doors were fastened, and everything was as usual.

In accordance with a custom that obtained in the house the lamp at the one end of the corridor was not turned quite out, so that Mr. Cranburn was enabled to trace the outline of objects, although he could not see them at all distinctly. The long corridor looked quiet and ghostly enough in the half-light, and very little imagination was required to people it with the spirits that were supposed to haunt it.

But Mr. Cranburn was not the sort of person to supply even the amount of credulity required, and all he saw were the three doors upon which his attention was fixed—that of the oak chamber, immediately opposite to him; that of the room adjoining, which was on the right; and the small door leading to the upstairs room, behind the curtain, on the left.

He must have been in his hiding-place for about two hours, when he heard the faintest possible sound, which was followed by the opening of the door of the oak chamber.

The lawyer's heart began to beat rather rapidly. He knew for a certainty that the room had been empty when he looked inside, that the door leading to the next room had been locked, and the window securely fastened. No one had entered it from the passage, and yet, by some occult agency, it was now tenanted!

He hardly breathed for the next few seconds, so anxious was he to see the further development of the drama. Very slowly the door opened, and there came into the passage a man, wearing a black silk mask over his face, and carrying in his hand a dark lantern, over which the slide was pulled down.

He paused for a second on the threshold, and advanced cautiously to the curtained doorway, where he waited. In less than a minute he was joined by the housekeeper, who, without speaking, produced a key, and silently fitted it into the lock of the curtained-door, which at once opened. What was beyond it the lawyer could not see owing to the dim light, but he rightly conjectured it to be a staircase, up which both man and woman disappeared.

Mr. Cranburn was in a dilemma. He greatly wished to see the interior of the oak chamber, and yet he was afraid to leave his hiding-place lest the conspirators should return. He finally decided to wait.

In less than five minutes the housekeeper came into the corridor, looked carefully up and down, and then went back, and apparently signalled that the coast was clear, for immediately afterwards the man appeared, carrying a long, narrow bundle, which he supported against his shoulder.

What was in that bundle? Mr. Cranburn asked himself, and he was conscious of a curious shiver of repulsion, for the shape of it was not unlike that of a human figure. However, he did not move, and Mrs. Pole and her companion entered the oak chamber, the door of which they carefully closed behind them. It was about ten minutes before they reappeared, empty-handed, and again ascended the staircase behind the curtained doorway.

Hardly had they disappeared before Mr. Cranburn became aware of a white-robed figure at the other end of the passage, which, as it approached nearer, he recognised as that of Anice.

As a matter of fact, the girl had grown so sick with suspense and apprehension that she had not been able to resist the temptation of coming to see whether anything had transpired; and after glancing round she approached Mr. Cranburn's hiding place, and in a low whisper demanded whether he had seen any one.

"Yes," he replied, in the same guarded tones, "but I can't explain to you now. Go and wake your father up, and fetch him here as quietly as possible. Tell him to bring his revolver in case of necessity."

Trembling, but otherwise betraying no sign of agitation, Anice slipped quietly back in order to obey the lawyer, and in very little time Mr. Seymour, attired in his dressing-gown, and armed with a revolver, accompanied Anice into the corridor. When he saw him, the lawyer came out from his hiding-place, and bidding the master of the house keep guard, he went into the oak chamber, closely followed by Anice.

The room was empty and dark, save for the moonbeams, but their light was sufficient to unravel the mystery that had perplexed so many people since that fatal night when the Squire met his death.

The window, which, as has before been said, was a heavy one, set in stone-work, was open, but not in the ordinary sense of the word, for the whole framework revolved on a pivot in the centre, and swung round, so that at the present moment, the casement was at right angles with the wall of the room.

Not till afterwards did Mr. Cranburn learn the secret of the spring that had defied so many examinations, and was so cunningly concealed that little short of a miracle would have found it out.

As the reader knows, a heavy stone buttress was built up close to the window, and on looking out Mr. Cranburn found, to his great amazement, that some bricks seemed to have been removed from one side of this, leaving an aperture large enough to admit a man's body. Between this aperture and the window of the oak chamber a little platform was let down, so as to form a communication from one to the other.

The lawyer had no time to pursue his investigations further, for just then came a stifled sort of cry from outside; and on hurrying to see whence it proceeded he found Mr. Seymour gripping the housekeeper with one hand, while the other grasped the revolver.

"Don't shoot me—oh, sir, don't shoot me, and I'll confess everything! I'll tell the truth, sir! I will! I will!" cried Mrs. Pole, who was in a state of too abject terror to think of anything except her own safety.

"Tell the truth, will you?" exclaimed Mr. Seymour, in a white heat of wrath. "It's more than that lying tongue of yours will let you do, I reckon; but, by Jove! if you don't—"

He did not complete this somewhat contradictory sentence, but his tone was menacing enough to dispense with the formality of words; and backed as it was by the pistol, it had a very considerable effect on the frightened housekeeper, who reiterated her willingness to "confess."

"Confess then!" said Mr. Cranburn, in a low, deep voice. "Confess that you were the murderess of the old Squire, and that you entered the oak chamber by means of the window from a secret staircase in the buttress."

"No, no!" she exclaimed, energetically. "It was not me—I was not even in the room at the time. When I went in he was quite dead, and whatever I had done would not have saved him!"

"If it was not you, who was it that killed him?"

Mrs. Pole did not seem inclined to carry out her promise, for she showed a decided inclination to shirk answering this question; but a slight pressure on her forehead of the cold muzzle of the revolver had an instantaneous result, and she whimpered forth:—

"It was an accident, sir. There was no intention to kill the Squire. If he hadn't woke up at that exact minute he would have been all right; but it was his heart disease as couldn't stand the chloroform."

"No prevarication, woman!" cried Mr. Seymour, sternly. "Again, and for the last time, I ask you who put the chloroformed handkerchief over the Squire's face?"

"It was—it was—" Mrs. Pole gasped for breath, and stole a glance at the lawyer's unbending face. "It was—Mr. Gilbert Dering!"

There was another nine days' wonder in W— when the news spread abroad—as it did very rapidly—that, after all, Lionel Dering was innocent, and his half-brother Gilbert was the real murderer of their uncle.

The whole story, magnified very considerably, was told and retold by the gossips of W—, and, shorn of comments, amounted to this:—Gilbert Dering, in looking over some old papers, had discovered a plan of the Ivy House that dated so far back as the Protectorate of Cromwell, and in this plan were set down the particulars both of the revolving window, of the trap-door in the buttress, and the narrow staircase leading down from it to the cliffs underneath the house. The young man made no mention of his discovery, but seems to have turned over in his mind certain plans for utilising it, with the result that he finally engaged in somewhat extensive smuggling operations, in which he was assisted by the housekeeper, Mrs. Pole, and her son. The latter was the owner of a small fishing smack, and had for some time previously carried on an illicit trade in lace, tobacco, &c.; indeed, it was this fact which suggested to Gilbert Dering that it might be possible to make a good deal of money by entering into a sort of partnership, which, of course, he intended to keep secret from everyone save the two others concerned.

The only excuse—if, indeed, it can be urged as an excuse—that the young man had, was the meanness of his uncle the old Squire, who kept him almost entirely without money, and at the same time openly stated his intention of leaving him nothing in his will.

Accordingly, Gilbert embarked in his dangerous enterprise, and when there was anything specially valuable brought over in John Pole's fishing smack it was taken up from the caves beneath the cliffs, through the buttress staircase and oak chamber to the little rooms in the roof that no one ever thought of entering.

On the night of the Squire's death the vessel had come in laden with an unusually good cargo, and as there was no chance of disposing of it at once it was decided to take it to the Ivy House, and let it remain there until Gilbert had a chance of taking it away. As ill-luck would have it, Mrs. Pole's letter to Gilbert,

telling him of the Squire's change of bedroom, never reached him; and so in the small hours of the night he brought part of the things up the staircase, and was just entering through the aperture of the revolving window when the Squire suddenly woke and sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes, and evidently not fully awake.

Gilbert declared that when he took out a handkerchief, and saturated it with chloroform which he had in a bottle in his pocket, he had no idea of doing any permanent injury to his uncle. His intention simply was to stupefy him, so that when he awoke in the morning he should have no remembrance of the events of the night, or, if he had, that he should imagine he had been dreaming. The young man forgot the bear's disease from which the Squire was suffering, and which was the real cause of his death, accelerated, of course, by the narcotic.

All this was told by Mrs. Pole as she knelt in the passage at the feet of Mr. Seymour, who diplomatically kept his revolver well to the fore.

Meanwhile the man in the black silk mask, who was none other than Gilbert himself, had become alarmed by the prolonged absence of this colleague, and, it is supposed, had stood for a moment behind the curtained doorway listening to her confession, which implicated himself so deeply that he decided flight to be his only alternative.

At any rate, when Mr. Cranburn went upstairs to search for him he found him gone, and the means of his escape indicated by a long knotted rope which hung from the tiny window in the roof.

With Mr. Gilbert Dering this history has no more to do. It is surmised that he escaped in John Pole's fishing-boat over to Holland; but beyond this his movements are wrapped in a mystery that is never likely to be solved. There could be but one opinion of his conduct in allowing his brother to be accused of the crime of which he himself was guilty; but he had hated Lionel from earliest boyhood, and had always been bitterly jealous of the elder's position as the Squire's heir; hence it is not improbable that mercenary as well as other motives actuated the part he played after his uncle's death.

As for Lionel, he was of course liberated on Mrs. Pole's statement, and not very long afterwards a wedding took place in the village church, at which a large concourse of spectators gathered.

The greatest possible interest was manifested in the ceremony, and people were unanimous in the opinion that a handsomer couple than Anice and Lionel Dering it would be impossible to find.

The housekeeper was requested to depart from Ivy House at her earliest convenience, which she did, muttering anathemas on Anice, whom she still regarded as her natural enemy.

Before she went she admitted that she and her son arranged the scene in the oak chamber that had so frightened Anice on the night of her father's absence from the Ivy House, and that it was done with a view of preventing the young lady from ever venturing in the haunted room again.

That same night certain bundles of tobacco were brought up from the fishing smack, and we know how near Anice was to discovering the conspirators as she passed the oak chamber on her way to get a book from the library.

Mrs. Pole's reluctance to having the house tenanted was now explained, seeing that so long as it was empty there was so much the better chance for her smuggling operations to escape detection, and the goods could also be taken away quite openly and in broad daylight, without fear of exciting suspicion.

The house is quite a different place now. The gloomy old trees have been cut down, and air and sunlight play freely on the newly-painted facade. The rooms are merry with the sound of children's laughter and the patter

of tiny feet; and its mistress, as the years go by, gains a fresh beauty and sweetness in the halo of happiness that encompasses her life.

[THE END.]

## FACETIÆ.

POLICEMAN: "I arrest you." Innocent Stranger: "What for?" Policeman: "None as yer back talk. Oil foind some reason becom ere and the station."

FREDDY (after a Bible lesson): "Mamma, I don't see why the brother of the Prodigal Son should have made such a fuss; it wasn't anything very grand to have real for dinner."

MARIA: "It's no use my trying to please you with my cooking; you are never satisfied." John: "You could suit me exactly if you'd only try." "How?" "By hiring a cook!"

LADY (to sea captain): "How do you manage to find your way across the ocean?" Captain: "By the compass. The needle always points to the North." "But suppose you wish to go South?"

OLD GENTLEMAN: "Little boy, I am grieved to see you smoking a cigarette." Willy: "What are yer talkin' 'bout? Yer don't s'pose a gent wid my allowance can sport a meerschaum!"

BOSTON HEIRESS: "I am afraid it is not for me, but for my money that you come here so often." Ardent Wooer: "You are cruel to say so. How can I get your money without getting you?"

FREDDY: "You have a new baby at the house, haven't you?" "Yeth'um." "What does little sister think about him?" "She says he's too sweet for anything." "And what do you think about him?" "I think he's a darned nuisance."

AUNTIE: "I suppose you are a good little Christian boy, Bobby, of course?" Bobby (dubiously): "Well, I don't know. Willie Waffles is a Christian boy, and I wouldn't like to be like him." Auntie: "What's the matter with Willie?" Bobby: "Every boy half his age in school can lick him."

An old salt had just heard of the death of a captain under whom he had made many voyages. "And what did he die of?" asked the old salt. "Of the rupture of a vessel," "And the right kind of death for a sailor, I tell you—at the post of duty," commented the old salt with much emphasis.

MERCHANT: "See here. I gave you a Waterbury watch for a Christmas present, and told you never to be late at your post again." Tardy Cash Boy: "Yesair." "Do you wind it every morning when you get up as I told you?" "Yessair." "Then what made you so late this morning?" "Winding it."

SCENE—A chemist's shop in a small Scotch town (time, the Sabbath morn). Enter small boy (log): "Gee's a pann'orth o' soap?" Chemist: "Na, na, laddie; ye'll get nae soap on the Sabbath." Small Boy: "What for, no? I seed ye sell a lassie a bambee's worth o' sweeties th' noo." Chemist: "Ay, ay; bit they wis ta seek i' the kirk!"

Mrs. BRISKE: "Johnny, did the doctor call while I was out?" Little Johnny (stopping his play): "Yea'm; he felt my pulse, an' looked at my tongue, and shook his head, and said it was a very serious case, and he left this prescription and said he'd call again before night." Mrs. Briske: "Gracious me! It wasn't you I sent him to see; it was the baby."

SWEET girl (in rowboat): "What is this hole in the back of the boat for?" Nice young man (rowing): "That is to put an oar in when you want to scull. Rowing requires an oar on each side, but sculling only one. I should sit where you are, and work it with one hand." Sweet girl (after meditation): "I wish you would try sculling for a while."

"HULLO, Benso! Here again? I have met you in this restaurant every day this week taking your dinner. Is your wife away from home?" "No. She has been reading a work called 'Practical Housekeeping,' and she is now trying to keep a family of three on two dollars a week. I have no doubt she will succeed, but it costs me fifty cents a day at this restaurant."

MISS SYMPATICA: "Dear Mrs. Brown. I miss that good-looking servant of yours. Where is she?" Mrs. B.: "She was so ineffably, in-sufferably, densely stupid that I had to part with her." Miss S.: "I am so sorry. I always sympathise with a woman too obtuse to earn her own living. Where is the poor girl?" Mrs. B.: "Doing well and making money. She runs an enquiry and intelligence office."

FATHER: "Do you think Fred's in earnest, Jane, about our daughter?" Mother (with conviction): "Sure of it." Father: "Well, I'm not so sure." Mother: "You silly old goose, look what the boy has given her—a music stool, a set of silver-backed hair brushes, a cookery book, and I don't know what else; he's doing a little preliminary furnishing in earnest. Oh, you men, what dull heads you are!"

SMITH! Smith! he called in a loud voice to a man a hundred feet ahead of him on Michigan avenue. The man halted and saluted as the second came up. "Hello! Green." "By George!" exclaimed the first, as he came up, "I have made a mistake. You are not Smith." "No, I am not." "And I am not Green." "No." "Well, well! Were you just going in after a drink?" "No, sir." "Neither was I. Isn't it curious how things do happen!"

SCENE—Brighton Esplanade. Young Lady (who was younger thirty years ago, to that jolly clubbie, Smith): "Do you remember, Geo.—Mr. Smith, how a year or so, that is ten years ago, I refused on almost this very spot your offer of marriage?" Smith: "Oh, yes, I remember it well enough." She (determined to swim the Niagara dream): "Well, George, I was a silly girl then, and I did not know how to appreciate your offer. I have changed my mind now." Smith: "So have I!"

THE Rev. Mr. Perkins being called upon suddenly to address a Sunday school thought he would get a few original ideas from his young hearers. "Children," said he, "I want some of you to tell me what I shall talk to you about to-night. What shall I say?" At first there was no response. "That bright little fellow over there," said he, pointing to a youngster on one of the back seats, "What shall I say to you to-night?" In a little piping voice came the answer: "Say amen and sit down."

MOTHER TO SON: "Well, James, I really thought there was going to be an engagement between Miss Rosebud and you, and I was hoping it was so, for she is a good, affectionate girl." "No, mother; Miss Rosebud is very pretty, and all that, but she is not the girl for my money, she's a good deal too affectionate to that beast of a pug of hers. I want a wife to attend to me, not to a brute like that." "Well, James, I know more about women than you do. I think I should try and supplant that dog in her affections if I were you."

MR. JENKINS (about to declare himself): "Well, Miss Grace, October is near at hand, and one hears 'good-by' on every side. We have been together all the summer—riding, driving, sailing and pleasure generally—and do you know, Miss Grace, what I have been thinking about? I have been asking myself—and I ask you—what is it all going to amount to?" Miss Grace (soudalised): "Mr. Jenkins, I am not so mercenary as to have thought of that phase of our intercourse. That is a question for you and your father to settle."

## SOCIETY.

SMALL filigree men adorn the newest Paris bracelets.

PERFUMED gloves are the latest craze with fashionable women.

DRESS collars are as high as ever, perhaps a little higher, and only the very narrowest edging can be permitted with them.

It should never be forgotten that tight sleeves are as unbecoming to a large hand, whether gloved or ungloved, as low heels to a long foot.

THE moonstone is the jewel of the hour. It is ground into all sorts of shapes, set round with tiny diamonds, forming brooches, rings, and pins; and very precious necklaces are made of these stones when strung on gold wires.

WHEREAS everybody's hair, when it is very black, gets by-and-by silvery, Madame Patti, who has nothing to do with inferior metals, has her hair, not silvery, but golden.

PRINCESS LOUISE, *sen.*, has sent two sketches to the Royal Scottish Water Colour Exhibition at Glasgow. They are both studies of heads, one of an American lady in pencil, and the other of a Maltese girl in water colour.

THE Queen will probably open Parliament in person, in compliance with Lord Salisbury's earnest wish. Of course nothing will be definitively settled for the next two months, but it is Her Majesty's intention, all being well, to preside at this function.

THE little King of Spain has learned to acquit himself most creditably, sitting bolt upright, and preserving a very commendable gravity, as he salutes the personages who defer before him in military fashion with his little fingers.

GOLDEN youths who wish to be *dans de mouvement* must in future eschew the dress-waistcoat, and wear in its place a black or crimson silk waist, wound three or four times round the waist. It is also whispered in influential quarters that coloured silk spats will be worn with evening dress.

THE Duke of Edinburgh has decided to live abroad because it is deemed expedient that he should reside at Coburg during several months in each year, as the heir to the Duchy; and under the new family ukase of the Czar the Duchess must pass at least three months of every year in Russia unless she wishes to lose a third of her allowance from the Imperial Treasury.

It is a remarkable fact that Queen Victoria of England, who has reigned for more than half a century, and who has passed the Psalmist's allotted span of life, is hale and comparatively hearty, and able at Balmoral to stand an atmosphere and climatic influences which would kill off half the crowned heads of Europe in a week.

THE curious fashion of presenting garters is carried out by no one else nowadays but the German Imperial family, but three centuries ago it was general in this country, the bridegroom making presents to most of the guests of ribbons, scarves, and gloves, while in Scotland the bride used to wear numberless knots of ribbon for distribution among her friends, the piper invariably tying one round his bagpipe.

RED-HEADED girls are dangerous in more ways than one, as appears from this item in an American paper: "A young lady with peachy complexion and a wealth of auburn hair went into Gaylord's barber-shop in Wilkesbarre yesterday, and let her tresses flow to have them curled. The barber wove the mass of hair around the hot iron, and staggered back as if he had been shot. The lady's hair was full of electricity, and the muscles of his arm were sore for an hour."

THE Empress of Austria is the best Royal housekeeper in Europe. She is as thoroughly acquainted with the details of the Imperial Austrian kitchen as her husband is with that of the Imperial Government. She superintends the household affairs of the big palace at the Austrian capital with the greatest care. She receives personally, reads and acts upon reports from cooks, butlers, keepers of the plate, and keepers of the linen.

## STATISTICS.

THERE were a little under 46,000,000 letters posted in New South Wales last year.

IN Paris there are 623 divorcees to 10,000 marriages. That is to say, one in every sixteen marriages ends in a divorce.

THE longest distance over which conversation by telephone is daily made is between Portland, Me., and Buffalo, N.Y., about 750 miles.

THE total number of lunatics, idiots, and persons of unsound mind in England and Wales, at the beginning of the present year (1889), was 84,340. This was an increase of 1,697 over the year before. The ratio of such persons to the whole population also increased during the year.

GERMANY is a Protestant country. Of its 21 universities, 14 are wholly Protestant, and three are partly so. There are more than 50,000 elementary schools in Germany, besides 16 polytechnic institutions, 500 high schools or gymnasia, and numberless seminaries and special schools. There are very few Germans that cannot read and write.

## GEMS.

A TATTLER's brain is like a beggar's pack; it contains little but what has been given to him.

WE never knew a man who could not bear another man's misfortunes perfectly like a Christian.

HASTY words often rankle the wound which injury gives; but soft words assuage it, forgiving cures it, and forgetting takes away the scar.

LAZINESS grows on people; it begins with cobwebs, and ends in iron chains. The more business a man has to do the more he is able to accomplish, for he learns to economise his time.

Do not judge a man by the clothes he wears. God made one, and the tailor the other. Do not judge him by his family, for Cain belonged to a good family. Do not judge a man by his failure in life, for many a man fails because he is too honest to succeed.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CUP PUDDINGS.—Take the weight of an egg in sifted sugar, butter, and flour; beat the egg thoroughly and gradually, mix with it the sugar and afterwards the flour and the butter, which should be partially melted so as to render it soft. A pinch of salt should always be added. Butter some cups well, and put a little jam or marmalade in the bottom of each. Fill them about three parts full with the mixture, and bake immediately in a quick oven. Turn the puddings out and serve them very hot with sweet or wine sauce as preferred.

SPONGE PUDDINGS.—Take the weight of two eggs, which will be four ounces, in flour, sugar, and butter; beat the butter to a cream, and then add the sugar and flavouring. Continue beating the mixture, and add two eggs, one at a time, then sift in gently the flour, which should have been passed through a sieve, and then made hot; lastly, add a teaspoonful of baking powder. Pour the mixture into a well-buttered mould; place a buttered paper over the top, and steam for an hour and a quarter.

PUFF PASTE (French).—Moisten  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. of flour with a little water, roll out the paste into a square; break  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. of butter into about sixteen pieces, and lay them on the pastry, making four rows, each row consisting of four pieces of butter; then fold up the paste into a small square, and leave it for a quarter of an hour; then roll it out again, fold it up as before, and leave it for another fifteen minutes; roll it out again, and it will be ready for use. This pastry must be made in a very cool place, and handled as lightly and as little as possible.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE last muzzling order sent thirty thousand dogs to the Dogs' Home.

THE Shah has at last reached Teheran, after his long holiday in Europe. We shall probably hear more about his European visit in the course of a few months, when he publishes his new diary.

BURIAL according to the orthodox Greek rite appears to include at least one gruesome ceremony. The deceased is dressed in full evening costume, and placed in a chair, around which are grouped many lighted candles. The prayers for the dead are then recited.

By a process invented by a German chemist, sugar can now be converted into blocks almost equal in solidity and firmness to marble, and as it is very much cheaper than that material, and can be cut or carved to fancy quite as successfully and artistically, it is not improbable that we may adapt this common article of food to more useful structural purposes than that of constructing impossible edifices on the outside of wedding cakes.

THE late King Louis of Portugal, though in many ways he was almost as eccentric as the ill-fated ruler of Bavaria, was a man of considerable energy. He was with us for a fortnight some three years ago, and spent most of his time at South Kensington, under the guidance of Sir P. C. Owen. His clean-shaven face, ill-fitting frock coat, swarthy complexion, and gold-headed cane gave him the appearance of a Turkish Pasha rather than that of a European potentate.

IN Latin John Smith is Joannes Smithus; the Italians smooth him off with Giovanni Smith; the Spaniards render him Juan Smithus; the Hollanders adopt him as Hans Schmidt; the French flatten him out as Jean Smeet; the Russian sneezes and barks as he says Ivan Smittowski. In China he is known as Jovan Shitmit; in Iceland as John Smithson; in Tuscaroras you forget all about Pocahontas and Powhattan when you hear them call Ton Qua Smittin. In Wales they speak of him as Jihon Semidd; in Mexico he is Jantli F'Smitti; among the Greek ruins the guide speaks of him as Ion Smikton, and in Turkey he is utterly disguised as Voe Self.

LIKE half the illnesses in this world, wrinkles are just asked for, and come at call. A frown brings its own mark, and plants little upright clefts between the eyes. Elevating the eyebrows, a trick many girls acquire early, draws long lines across the forehead in no time, and takes five years' freshness from the countenance. An artificial smile, if assumed too extensively, marks two grand furrows from the nose to the corners of the mouth. Sitting up late reading novels sets a fine cross round the eyes. Another assortment of lines is gained by a frequent laugh, and these are least disfiguring of all, and need not distress their owner. The imprint of suffering is another matter, quite outside passing comment; but the previous list comes at bidding, and might be prevented "did a body ken in time."

How many of the myriads who in childhood have sung "There is a happy land, far, far away," knew anything of its writer? His name is Andrew Young, and he is now eighty years of age, still mentally and physically vigorous, and retaining in all its early freshness his sympathy with children. The hymn was composed in 1838. The tune to which it is married is an old Indian air, which blended with the music of the woods in the primeval forest long before Sunday schools were thought of. The hymn was composed for the melody. Its bright and strongly-marked phrases struck Mr. Young's musical ear the first time he heard it casually played in the drawing-room. He asked for it again and again. It haunted him. Being accustomed to relieve the clamour of his thoughts and feelings in rhyme, words naturally followed, and so the hymn was created. It got into print. It has been translated into nineteen different languages. And yet the author has never received, and, indeed, has never been offered, a penny in remuneration.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**THEATRE.**—No certificate is necessary in setting up a school.

**CALIBAN.**—We do not know of any book on the subject.

**ROLLING STONE.**—It is a trade question. Apply to someone in the business.

**H. H. H.**—The line quoted, "A day's march nearer home," is by James Montgomery.

**LEONT.**—We do not know of any such book. A scientific bookseller should be able to help you.

**TALL GIRL.**—Your height, weight, etc., are all above the average; especially for a girl of eighteen.

**SPRING.**—A lad of seventeen has seldom done growing. It is impossible to say what his height will be.

**COQUETTE.**—A true lady would never flirt—she would never stoop to anything so heartless and vulgar.

**ELEEN.**—Skirts are worn somewhat longer than during the summer, the suspicion of a train being seen on some.

**H. W. B.**—The story did not appear in the "London Reader." It is one of Miss Braddon's earliest and best tales.

**MOTHER HUBBARD.**—You must choose for yourself. A man's goodness and worth do not depend upon his complexion.

**CHRISTINA.**—Yours is a case for an oculist, it is quite impossible for a stranger to advise you. Probably glasses might be of use.

**J. P.**—We recommend designing, architecture, or photography. Either will afford you a fair if not lucrative support.

**BUSTY BEK.**—There are so many forms of heart-disease that it is impossible to answer your question. Some are curable, some not.

**BRUTUS.**—"Rigging up a juryman," is putting up a temporary mast in place of one carried away in a gale, or otherwise destroyed or damaged.

**ELLA.**—1. Your handwriting and composition are good. 2. Hazel eyes are not very uncommon, nor is there any particular significance about them.

**JUDY.**—If you can find no meaning yourself in a kiss from the gentleman you are engaged to, you can hardly expect anyone else to interpret the caress for you.

**DRAMA.**—Mrs. Elizabeth Inchbald, the English lady referred to, was celebrated as an actress, dramatist, and novelist. Her husband was an actor of reputation.

**JACK.**—The Martini-Henry is the rifle used in the British service. Its weight is eight pounds and twelve ounces, and its muzzle velocity is 1,353 feet per second.

**OLD AGE.**—You need not fancy yourself an old maid at twenty-six. It is much better to wait to a reasonable age than to rush into matrimony before you are fairly out of your girlhood.

**A. M. G.**—We are not acquainted with the particular code of flirtation to which you allude. We are very happy to answer any questions that we can for our friends free of any charge.

**AURORA.**—You had better let your parents know, even if they are likely to disapprove of the match; to marry without their knowledge would be a rash and unadvisable step for a girl to take.

**NOODLE.**—If you have not resolution enough to cure yourself of such a babyish and disgusting habit, you can hardly expect us to help you. All bad habits can be overcome by an effort of will.

**ONE IN LOVE.**—Your mother is no doubt quite right, and you are very wrong to disobey her. You would do well not to speak to any man again who could do anything so disgusting and vulgar.

**NEMO.**—The sentence, "The better day the better deed" was written by Sir John Holt, Lord Chief Justice of the Queen's Bench. He was a native of Thane, England, and was educated at Oxford.

**HARTWELL.**—The family of Bourbon took its name from the rich district in the centre of France called the *Bourbonnais*, which in the tenth century was one of the three great baronies of the kingdom.

**BERNARD.**—Yes. There is a burial-place near Mount Gerizim and Jacob's Well, in Northern Palestine, traditionally held to be the tomb of the patriarch Joseph. It is believed to be genuine.

**J. H.**—"For the love of money is the root of all evil" occurs in I. Timothy, chapter 6, verse 10. "For this thing was not done in a corner" was spoken by Paul before Agrippa. See Acts, chapter 26, verse 26.

**DENMARK.**—The only way to raise the pile of velvet or plush is to steam it at the back with boiling water, and then rub it over a hot iron fixed upright so as to allow of the material being passed over it on the wrong side.

**EMERALDA.**—Perhaps you are overfeeding your pet. Give it less food, and avoid soaked bread. Let it have plenty of green stuff and clean sand. If this treatment does no good, take it to the nearest bird-fancier and ask his advice.

**BARTON BOY.**—It would be difficult to master the principles of English grammar without a competent teacher. By patient study, however, a person could learn much of what is taught in the ordinary textbooks on English grammar. Almost any such textbook would answer your purpose.

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## HER MISSION.

SHE was only a little woman, 'tis true,  
And hers was a common story;  
She never had dreamed of a thing to do  
That would lead to fame or glory.

She could not paint, and she could not sing,  
And she could not write a sonnet;  
She had not a face that could lend a grace  
To a stylish love of a bonnet.

She had not wealth, and she knew not ease;  
She never had travelled for pleasure;  
She knew not the art to charm and please  
In the realm of social leisure.

And yet she deemed that her life was blest  
In its humble sphere of duty,  
Though only those who knew her best  
Guessed half of its hidden beauty.

For hers was a genius for little things,  
The realm of home to brighten;  
And she scorned not the humblest work that brings  
Some force to cheer and lighten.

For comfort and order were hers to command,  
And the joys of life seemed longer,  
While childhood clung to her loving hand,  
And manhood, through her, grew stronger.

And some who loved her were half afraid  
That her sphere was far too small;  
But, oh, the happy home she made  
Was a great thing after all!

And when her beauteous spirit shall flee  
From its realm of loving and giving,  
Her stainless monument shall be  
The lives that were blessed by her living.

A. R. H.

**BRIDE.**—One of the great points to be considered in a travelling dress is comfort, especially on a long journey; and to ensure this, no style of costume is so reliable as a plain tailor-made skirt and a jersey bodice to match in colour.

**MOLAR.**—1. Foreign diplomats are generally looked upon with some degree of suspicion in England. You had better ask someone in the profession. 2. Any foreign outfitter will tell you. 3. You must cross the Bay in going.

**ARETHUSA.**—Not knowing the gentleman we cannot possibly say what his sentiments may be. Kissing is not always a sign of affection. Probably you will find out for yourself before long whether he is really attached to you or not.

**DOT.**—The lady about whom you all gossiped so freely was certainly indiscreet to provoke her neighbours into such a discussion of her conduct. If your description of her behaviour is strictly correct, she is pursuing a dangerous course.

**MARIE.**—The bride carries a bouquet even if she is married in her travelling dress. It is made of white flowers, and is the gift of the bridegroom. The bride's mother generally carries a bouquet of coloured flowers. The bridegroom presents it to her.

**SORROWFUL ANNIE.**—If your statement is true in spirit and in word, your husband is certainly behaving very shabbily towards you, and is sowing a future harvest of sorrows and remorse for himself. You could not get a divorce on such grounds as those you state. You must, like many another ill-used wife, do the best you can, and leave the result to Providence.

**SISTER DORA.**—There is nothing so bad as darkness in a sick-room, nor anything more health-restoring than sunlight. If the patient's eyes are weak, they can be protected by a screen, but the room should be flooded with the cheering, purifying, healing rays of the sun.

**HOPELESS.**—The only thing for you to do is to find someone who knows the lady and get an introduction to her. That is if you cannot forget her, which would be the easiest and safest way out of the dilemma. There is an old ditty which says, "Love will find a way." Perhaps a way will suggest itself to you sometime if you cannot take the advice we offer.

**PERPLEXITY.**—Sleeplessness is a very common effect of much worry and work. We can only recommend you to take plenty of exercise and fresh air, and pay attention to your diet. Do not eat heavy suppers; but remember, at the same time, that it is just as fatal to a night's rest to go to bed fasting as to eat more than is necessary. A tepid bath, if you can get it, is a capital sleep-inducer.

**GALATEA.**—The annoyance you complain of is very provoking, but you cannot take the law into your hands and kill animals belonging to your neighbour; you can sue him for the damage done by them. Such matters are always best settled amicably, if possible, and the gentleman you complain of must be very unreasonable if he does not try and prevent his pets from spoiling your flower-beds.

**A BRIDE TO BE.**—1. The bridal tour is going out of fashion, some young married couples making a short journey, while others borrow the house of a relative or friend in a quiet country spot, and spend the honeymoon in this retirement, and then take a wedding tour after they have been married for some months. 2. The bride should dress so as to appear as little like a bride as possible when travelling.

**ETIQUETTE.**—1. The accent is on the first syllable. 2. Quite right to keep your bonnet on when you are invited to lunch. If you have a heavy wrap you may leave it with the servant before you enter the drawing-room. Take your gloves off at the table, and put them on again in the drawing-room just before leaving. 3. No, do not put your arm on the table at dinner. It would not look well. Try to be easy without getting into bad habits.

**ROSALINDE.**—1. A little common soda in the water should make your hair lighter, but it must not be used too often or too strong or it will make the hair brittle. 2. A marriage properly performed before the registrar is perfectly legal. 3. We have no acquaintance with the gentleman, and if we had, we should not publish his private affairs in these columns. 4. You write a very pretty and legible hand. We are much obliged to you for the receipt you sent us. We are always glad to get any new ones.

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